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Unspeakable gift

THE UNSPEAKABLE GIFT AND OTHER SERMONS

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THE UNSPEAKABLE GIFT

AND OTHER SERMONS

PREACHED IN A HISTORIC PULPIT

BY

E. GRIFFITH-JONES

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TO THE MEMORY OF

CHARLES SILVESTER HORNE

First Superintendent-Minister of Whitefield's Central Mission

PREACHER, PATRIOT, REFORMER, FRIEND

AND

TO THE LOYAL WORKERS OF THE CHURCH AND MISSION

WITH WHOM IT WAS A PRIVILEGE TO BE ASSOCIATED

FOR EIGHT FATEFUL BUT HAPPY MONTHS

AUGUST, 1917—MARCH, 1918

FOREWORD

THE greater part of the following sermons were preached during the autumn and winter months of 1917-18, from the pulpit of Whitefield's Central Mission, Tottenham Court Road, London, where the writer filled the post of temporary Superintendent-Minister for a short time, the College of which he is Principal being closed owing to the world-war. A few were preached elsewhere as well.

These are not war-sermons, though preached during war-time. Such discourses as were delivered on war-topics during these months are omitted—all except one, that on peace-making. It was felt best to do this in view of the many books of war-sermons that have been recently published. It will be noted that the evangelic note is sounded throughout these sermons, as was meet in view of the character of the audiences who listened to them. At the same time the "teaching" note is equally prominent, as should be the case, in the writer's judgment, in all preaching. While the range of subjects is wide and apparently miscellaneous, it will be found that they are unified by the central position given in all of them to the Person and Work of Jesus Christ—God's Unspeakable Gift, the central topic, surely, of all genuine Christian preaching. To exalt HIM as the Light, the Truth, and the Life of all vital religion has been the one aim of the writer's preaching from his youth up, and in view of the reception given to these discourses as they were preached, he is more than ever convinced that herein lies the secret of all

successful work in the pulpit. In spite of the frequent "aerial raids" which took place in London during those months of tense anxiety and national danger, considerable congregations gathered together Sunday by Sunday to hear the Gospel preached to them, whose close attention and responsive spirit will ever be among the preacher's most grateful memories. More than this—he found in this work a signal reinforcement to his own faith at a time of severe tension and universal spiritual disturbance. He commends these discourses therefore to his readers as having come from a full heart, and as having been tested by the acceptance of congregations of very miscellaneous composition, but of eager and responsive spiritual temper.

It will be found that here and there the subjects overlap, and that some of the preacher's dominant beliefs are re-emphasised over and over again from various points of view ; but he trusts it will be found that this will help rather than hinder the total impression. He prays that these sermons may be blest in their perusal, as they were in their delivery—certainly to the preacher, and, as he has reason to believe, to many a hearer also.

As each sermon is complete in itself, the discourses have been thrown into such order as seems to the writer to give the reader a constant change of topic and so to maintain the interest through contrast rather than similarity.

E. GRIFFITH-JONES.

United College, Bradford,
September, 1918.

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"To restore a simple faith is the object of the great teacher ; but the simplicity of the faith he seeks to restore on the basis, not of ignorance, but of knowledge."

R. B. HALDANE.

I

PROLOGUE—A NEW SONG

"O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth."—PSALM XCVI. 1.

IT is high time some of us sang a new song unto the Lord. Many of the old songs are worn out; they have become common and threadbare; they no longer touch the springs of our emotion, or express the ecstasies of our faith. We have been singing the songs of the olden time too long. These ancient worthies, whose words we chant and whose phrases we repeat so glibly, uttered their own joy and gave voice to their own triumph; but we have other battles to fight, and other victories to celebrate; and if we have not, then it will not avail for craven hearts to repeat the triumphs of nobler men and women. New times need new men, and new men should sing new songs, welling up spontaneously from the depths of their own hearts.

"Our age," wrote Emerson long ago—and with qualifications it is still true of us to-day—"is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes the biographies, historic criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and Nature face to face; we through their eyes. Why should we not also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should we not have a poetry and philosophy of insight instead of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us and not the history of theirs? Embosomed for a season in Nature, whose floods of life

stream around and through us, and invite us, by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to Nature, why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe ? The sun shines for us to-day also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship." Yes, and let us sing our own new songs to the Lord, whose arm is doing wonderful things for us too, and whose mercy is still over all His works.

What does a " new song " mean ?

I

It means, first of all, *a new and living experience.* True poetry is the sublimated and purified essence of life. Real music is emotion breaking into rhythm, as a wave breaks into foam and sound. There has never been an age of great poetry which was not first an age of great action, great thought, great living. You can no more have lovely blossomings without hidden roots than you can have great poetry or music without a genuine authentic experience out of which they spring. What would our love-songs be without the passion of man and woman out of which they are born ? What would Homer be without the heroes whose praise he sang? What would the Psalms of David be without the yearnings, the aspirations, the triumphant joy in God of which they are the expression ? There would be no love-songs but for love, nor could they be sung but for the love they reawaken in hearts that listen ; no heroic poems without the faith that soars above doubt and fear and sorrow, and so breaks into triumph.

A New Song

We read of creative ages and eras in art, in literature and music; and under this phrase we think there lies a great mystery. So it is; but the mystery is not all dark, for it is the mystery of a generation of men and women intensely alive—alive to beauty, or to adventure, or to religion, or to all three. And when we call an age introspective, or self-conscious, or critical, as opposed to creative, we ban that age as lacking in vigour, and glow, and vitality. It is an age of imitators, a generation of decadents, who can only repeat what others have said because they have nothing fresh to say, and sing old songs because they are not capable of inventing new ones.

We grow tired of the long perspectives and far-off vistas of our religious lives. "God has not spoken for nineteen centuries, since the last gospel was compiled and the last epistle written." Such is the assumption that underlies much of our theologies and nearly all our creeds. We are always looking back; straining our eyes into the mist of antiquity; building our neat little temples out of the chips and fragments of those grand old sanctuaries in which the ancients worshipped God face to face, and felt the breath of His Spirit on their souls. Is it right that we should dishonour the living God so? Has He, then, nothing to say to us? Can we not live near to Him and hear His voice, and realise His mighty, moving presence in our own hearts? Surely, if we cannot, it is not because He has no word to say; it is because we have no ears to hear, no hearts to understand. We are weary of hearing and reading of a Jesus who lived and loved and died and rose again 2,000 years agone; if He be not alive to-day, and if He will not manifest Himself to us as well as to John and Peter and Philip, it avails us nothing that their

hearts burned within them as they walked with Him in the way. We must live our own religion, and find our own way to God, and feel the power of a living present Saviour, or our faith is a mythology, and our creed a tissue of empty traditions. We shall never sing a new song till we have lived a real, pulsing, genuine new life of our own, not the pale shadow of other and greater lives.

This does not mean that our faith is to be made independent of, or to be cut off from, the past; nor that we need another Gospel or a new Christ. As our physical life is rooted in the immemorial generations of the past, so our spiritual nature is fed by filaments which strike deep into the subsoil of past centuries of faith and experience. "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" is true of the content of our faith as of nothing else. But if we only receive our religion as a tradition, instead of using it as a foundation from which to rear our own temple of worship, as a vantage-ground from which to start our exploration of new spiritual horizons for ourselves, as the raw material out of which we may weave our own garment of praise, then it will be our spiritual shroud and sepulchre. Whatever visions we may inherit, we must see God for ourselves, or we shall not see Him at all. Whatever songs and psalms come echoing down the ages, we must hear His voice with our own ears or He will be for ever dumb. They must rise out of our own struggles and deliverances, or we shall soon cease singing at all.

And, thank God, it is given to us to have this fresh, sweet, vivid communion with Him, which breaks into song. Just as the spring is as lovely for our eyes to-day as though it were the first that ever

blossomed out of chaos, so the millennial experience of the race in things spiritual does in no wise interfere with the freshness, the zest, the vital reality of our own experience of God. I can hear His voice in my garden in the cool of the day, as well as Adam in Eden ; I can become a new creature in Christ Jesus as truly as St. Paul ; "all things are become" as "new" to me when I realise the royalty of Divine grace as they became to Augustine when heaven broke in on his tormented soul, and he walked forth out of his prison-house into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Therefore I can sing a new song of my own to Him who hath visited and redeemed His people from their sins.

II

A new song, again, means *a bright outlook and a bold spirit*. The faith that has no future, has no song on its lips, for there is no hope in its heart. It is a paradox, but also a truth, that we cannot sing adequately of bygone times unless our eye is on the future ; we cannot celebrate a living experience except as a promise of better things to come. If we have come to the end of things, then let us fall dumb—there is no food for song in us.

The critic who said, "All the songs have been sung, and all the stories been told," if he had spoken in sober truth, and not in satiric jest, would have sounded the knell of life as well as art. If we can but repeat the lives and thoughts and experiences of those who have passed away, let us creep into our graves ; "the game is not worth the candle." Life is never a repetition of past life. Crystals repeat themselves, but living creatures are all "new creations." You have a favourite dog ; shall I tell

you he is a "repeat" of countless others in the same street or township? Your love for your dog gives me the lie; though you had all dogs to choose from, they would not be your dog; there is something in him that you love because he is himself and not another dog; and if he died no other could quite fill his place to you. So in lower things we can see the law of the higher. We may be imitative beings in our outward behaviour, but every soul that lives is in itself a fresh creation; it has never been here before; it will never part with its intensely individual life and be merged into the impersonal again. And so long as souls are fresh and new and original, so long will life contain an original element. My life is different in its essence from yours. I follow my lonely star across unvoyaged seas; we are all being led "along a way that we knew not," and no one has been there before. And what is true of you and me is true of every generation. History never "repeats" itself; every nation has a new rôle to fill, a new destiny to attain, a future of its own to mould and conquer.

And so let us not always keep singing the songs of the past. God has given us a new time and a glowing future, and He looks that we should sound out of this new time a new song. What is past is over and gone. Let it go. It is mainly a record of broken aims and sorry failures and half-victories at the best. To-day we live; to-morrow is ours, too, to conquer and fill with great deeds. The children of God ever march breast forward, "greeting the unseen with a cheer." They know that the future is misty and full of dread secrets, but that daunts them not. If God entrusts to us a future that calls for the same heroic spirit as the past

evoked, it must not find us nerveless and cowardly. Come what may, we have Him and His everlasting Word to direct, inspire, and reward us there as here.

Ah! but all songs are not "songs of degrees, songs of the upward way." Life has its threnodies and elegiac hymns and strains of mourning. "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord my Rock!" It is the minor key in which many songs are pitched, and some that begin in bright outpourings of hope die ere they are done on lips too weak and pale to finish them. Will God listen to such songs as these?

Yes, if they come from a heart of faith. That is the beautiful element in the Hebrew Psalms. Many of them are more like wails than songs; they are sad beyond the scope of any music to express; and that because they came from the hearts of saints who were in extremity, and who had no one but God to whom to turn. But that is just their redeeming feature. They rise "out of the pit"; but they lift themselves to the stars. "O my God, my soul is cast down within me. . . . All Thy billows have gone over me. . . . Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." There you have the typical threnody of the Psalms, an undertone of sorrow and sadness rising into clear, bird-like notes of spiritual hope and exultation. Such a song as that is always a new song to him who can repeat it from his heart, for it betokens a new and unconquerable spirit in him. And the songs of the Christian are to be such songs. If they begin in a low register, and are shot with tremulous chords

and shaking discords, they must "beat their music out" at last, and rise into clear melodies of hope and praise. God will have no song from His children that ends in wails of despair. He will hallow their sorrows and transform their fears; but He cannot help those who will not turn their faces to the light.

Who shall be the songster of this great time in which we are living to-day? We are passing through deep waters. The foundations of life are being moved. There are portents in the sky, and on the earth, and in the sea. The very waves that break on the "inviolate shores" of this favoured land are stained with innocent blood. The fabric of our boasted civilisation is being torn to shreds. The world is again in the making. We are out to lay safe and deep the foundations of a greater and a securer time. And we shall need great voices to give true expression to the new ideals and aspirations of the days to be. There are heroes to be celebrated, noble deeds to be commemorated, tragedies of love and sorrow to be put into form, threnodies of death and glory to be sung by someone. We wait for the poets, mystics, seers who shall give voice to the people's soul, and interpret for them the Divine meaning of all the misery and grandeur of the mighty upheavals through which they are passing.

But what shall be the keynote of our new song to God in this generation? Shall it not still be Jesus? He has been the delight, the joy, the dearest friend of our forefathers, who trusted in Him for deliverance, and comfort, and guidance in all their tribulations, and who were never put to confusion. Every truly Christian poem is full of His presence; it is a tribute to His sovereign grace; it is a story of His conquering love; it is a rhapsody of joy

at the thought of His unspeakable glory. Shall He not do for us what He did for them? There are many hymns and songs to Jesus which are distasteful to us to-day because of their crude and sensuous form; then let our love and adoration express itself in a guise more adequate to our own need and outlook! He is worthy of all "power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing," for He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." The highest genius may well lay its brightest tribute of rhythm and melody at His feet, and the lowliest voice may acceptably sing it. Old songs, after all, become new if sung with a new spirit; and new songs are one with all the old if they express the same freshness of worship and love as the old did in their day.

Have you a new song in your hearts this morning? Is it a song of deliverance from one of the prisons of the soul? Let your voice ring out like that of a released captive in joyous exultation in the glorious liberty wherewith Christ has made you free. Is it a song of praise for some great experience in spiritual things, some fresh grasp of Divine truth, some ray of light on the dark places of life? Then tell it forth; others may catch the same light from your countenance, the same thrill from your happy voice.

Have you a great joy before you? Hallow it by tracing it to its Divine source; let it rise like a fountain behind which are deep reservoirs of passionate delight in God. Then will your happiness be doubled, and your "song shall be in the daytime." Or does your song this morning rise out of the desert? Is it a cry for help, for succour, for escape out of some intolerable situation of coming trouble?

Let your cry be unto the Lord ; let faith be its keynote, and before it ends its despair will rise into triumph. There are "songs in the night" that always bring a happy morning.

So let us each in our own way, and according to our experience of the Divine mercy and love, sing a "new song" to the Lord. A songless faith is a dying faith ; a faith that has the future before it and heaven at last, where the multitude whom no man can number will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, ancient as time, yet new as the morning, will begin its song here—a pilgrim-song, but one already touched with the note of triumph and of joy.

II

THE WONDERFUL LIFE

"And there are many other things which Jesus did . . . which are not written in this book : but these are written, that ye may believe that He is the Son of God ; and that, believing, ye may have life in His name."—JOHN XX. 30, 31.

IT is a problem that must at one time or another trouble every devout reader of the New Testament—why the Gospels are so brief ; why they tell the story of the Wonderful Life in so fragmentary and unfinished a manner. What we have of it fills us with a sense of the mystery, the beauty, the holiness of that strange Person who spake as never man spake, and whose life was a tissue of

> "perfect deeds,
> More strong than all poetic thought."

It is as though a heavenly strain of music, struck by aerial fingers, suddenly fell among the discords of earth, until the world began perforce to listen, and then ceased in the midst of an unfinished cadence. The story of Jesus is told within about eighty pages of scanty narrative, a large part of which is told three and some of it four times over, and then—silence! A few words and discourses that burn like flame, and flow like light into our hearts ; a few wonderful deeds pregnant with love, fragrant with pity, filled with the thrill of a heavenly grace ; gleams and flashes of mysterious powers, pent-up in the gentlest and most self-contained character that ever breathed ; one awful and solemn tragedy of unparalleled

grandeur and gloom ; a strange rumour of a Resurrection from the dead, followed by appearances in which the One that died once more veritably communed with his friends as of old ; a final disappearance into the Unseen, and then, an end ! If so much, why not more ? If mere hints and fragments of the story are so pregnant and life-giving, what would the complete record have been ?

Our text tells us the answer to this mystery of the story of Jesus as we have it. We learn from it from the Fourth Evangelist—and in this matter he is but speaking for the other Evangelists as well—that he had a perfectly clear and definite purpose before him, and that this purpose governed him both in the matters he included, and in those he omitted from his narrative. That general purpose may be summed up in three words. It was his desire, in the first place, to bear his testimony to the essential truth of the story as he told it; secondly, so to unfold the story that its spiritual contents should be made clear; thirdly, to bring its motive power to bear on the reader. The story, to put it in its briefest form, represents a Reality; it unfolds a Revelation; it offers a Redemption. "That ye may believe. . . ." "That ye may believe that Jesus is the Son of God. . . ." "That believing ye may have life in His Name."

Let us very briefly apply these tests to the Gospel story, and show how perfectly they have been achieved within so brief a compass, so that we may realise that while the brevity of the Gospel awakens our wonder, it also satisfies our needs.

I

The Wonderful Life as a Great Fact in History.—The first thing aimed at in the Gospels is to convey the

conviction that the story is true. It is not told as a religious fiction; it is not given as the growth of the spiritual fancy; it is not a conglomerate of pious traditions overgrown with legend; it is told as something that really happened. Whatever may be our attitude on the questions of criticism, high or low, this is incontrovertible—that the Evangelists believed and claimed that they were telling the truth, that they were putting before us the records of a life actually lived, and of words actually spoken by Him of whom they write. This is not a question of verbal infallibility, of inerrancy in minor details, or of any such puerile and negligible trifles, but it is a question of substantial reality. They give us a picture of the Blessed Life, either in lightning flashes as in Mark, or in delicately chased outlines as in Luke; they give us the words of truth and grace that came forth from His lips, either with pregnant literalness as in Matthew, or with loving expansion as in John. But whether it be the story of the life or the summary of the teaching, the Evangelists claim that they were not only honest men, but that they knew what they were writing about; that the story they tell is, indeed, part of the solid history of the world—nay, its very crown and climax.

This claim is important in view of two tendencies that have recently been manifesting themselves in the treatment of the Gospel narrative. There is, in the first place, the school of "scientific" historians, who decline to accept the narrative as historical on this or that critical ground; and there is, secondly, the school of "philosophical" theologians, who say that it matters not really whether the story be an actual fact or not, that its religious value consists, not in its historicity, but in its character as an embodiment of

certain saving ideas. A word about the latter only here.

They put the case thus: "It does not greatly matter whether such a person as Jesus Christ really lived, and spoke, and died, and rose again as these narratives say He did. What is of infinite significance is that such a story should have been conceived as possible, and be told in such a matchless and satisfying form. Whether there ever was on earth a Being conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of a Virgin, so incarnating the Second Person in the Trinity; whether miracles were really wrought by Jesus of Nazareth, or were merely attributed to Him; whether He really gave His life on the Cross a sacrifice for sin, and a ransom for many from eternal guilt and death; whether He truly rose from the dead, and appeared to His disciples in visible form, and was then taken into the Unseen—all this is of little importance. But that such ideas should be born, and become the property of the human race, and lift up men's minds out of the grovelling materialism of their lives—this is of great, of infinite importance, and that this is so is shown by the wonderful effect which this history, as a story, has always had on men's lives from New Testament times to these. This," they tell us, "is what makes the imperishable value of the Gospel for us."

A certain plausibility is given to this theory, in view of the deep impression left by many works of imagination, and the immense influence exerted by them. We are familiar, for instance, with the great impetus given to the anti-slavery movement throughout the world by the romance called "Uncle Tom's Cabin"; we know that the penalty of imprisonment for debt was largely removed from the

statute book through the influence of Dickens's "Little Dorrit"; we know how Poor Law relief was made humaner in its application to the deserving poor through the impression created by a character in "Our Mutual Friend"; we know how the People's Palace in the East End is the direct outcome of one of Sir Walter Besant's stories; we well remember how certain grievous social abuses were cleared away by the impression left by the vivid and harrowing works of Charles Reade. Now, the implication is that as these results were the outcome of professedly imaginary scenes and characters, none of whom (with the one exception of Uncle Tom) had any existence in point of fact, or were ever supposed to have existed by the reader; so we may be sure that the influence of the Gospel narrative will remain, even though we may be called to give it up as a history; and that men will be moved by it, uplifted by it, saved by it, so long as it remains on record—the most wonderful and lovely dream ever enshrined in the adoring fancy of humanity.

What shall we say of this ingenious theory? This: that the parallel between the effect of our latter-day romances, written with an ethical purpose, on minds that know them to be romances, and who read them with the knowledge that the story is unimportant except as a vehicle for the ideas they embody on the one hand, and the influence exerted by the Gospels on the other is altogether fallacious. For in reading the Gospels we are brought into that relation to the Person of Jesus, and to His words and deeds, and to His death and Resurrection, which forces us into an attitude of faith or unbelief, not merely towards the ideas embodied in the narrative, but to the narrative itself; indeed, not merely to the

narrative as such, but to Him whose life-record and story it tells. If, therefore, as Harnack has told us in his book, "What is Christianity?" "Christianity is Christ Himself," it must vanish if once Christ is banished from the scene of history into the fairy-land of myth. What has made historical Christianity is the belief that the story of the Gospels is true, that Jesus was the Son of God, that He lived a human life, died more than a human death, rose from the grave because He could not be holden by death, and, after appearing to His disciples and communing with them certain days, was taken up into the heavenly world, whence He sent His Spirit to be the Guide and Comforter of His people. This faith has been the formative principle of the Church in all ages—from the time when Paul passionately wrote to those who were even then busy whittling away at the evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus, "if Christ hath not been raised, then our preaching is vain"—down to these days, in which the same process is going on, and with the same results.

Let us be sure of this, that if once this theory of the unimportance of the historical foundation of Christianity really takes possession of the mind of Christendom, there may be possibly a Christianity of the future, but it will assuredly not be the Christianity of the past, nor will it be likely to produce the same results. For nineteen centuries it has been shown over and over again, positively, that faith in the historical Gospel is the creative germ of the Church; and, negatively, that a loss of faith in the historical Gospel is the death-knell of the Church. A sublimated Christianity—*i.e.*, a Christianity in which Idea takes the place of Fact—is a doomed Christianity. It will suffice to cheer the deepening twilight of a

waning faith, but it will never kindle the light of a new morning in religious life. We may be sure that no less a force can keep Christianity alive than that which gave it birth ; and this was unquestionably a passionate faith in the reality of the story of Jesus, whereof the Apostles were the witnesses. How far all this has evidential value as regards the story itself I will not now pause to inquire. I would merely in passing point out this significant feature of the case—that the story of Jesus, where frankly accepted in all its necessary implications and claims as a reality, has never failed to have the same transforming effect, first in the individual life, then in the Church, then in the world, and this in every age and land. But for the moment I am content to say that what gives Christianity, as a religion, its power is not the ideas it embodies, but, in the first resort and the last, the facts which it presents. If the story of Jesus be not true, then Christianity is vain, and the Church that goes by His name will, in the end, perish.

II

The Wonderful Life as a Revelation.—"That ye may believe that Jesus is the Son of God." This is the second of the three purposes of the Gospel story—to show forth the revelation of God's nature as the Father, and of His saving purpose through the Son. This is the special aim of the Fourth Gospel as distinguished from the others. The Synoptics are mainly concerned with the historic aspects of the life of Jesus. They were written when the details of that life were more or less fresh and vivid ; when the very words, presence, even gestures of the Master as He spoke, were still remembered with some distinctness ; when, if I may put it so, what

Jesus said and did and suffered was of more interest than any theory of His nature, or the significance of His Person. The Fourth Gospel was written at a considerably later date, probably at the end of the first century, or possibly later, by which time the details of the Wonderful Life were growing somewhat dim, and were running a little into one another, as it were, like the blurred outlines of a receding mountain. We do not, therefore, go to the Fourth Gospel with the same expectation of finding verbal accuracy and pictorial vividness in the words and doings of Jesus. We find here general impressions rather than clearly defined details. The discourses of Jesus in John lack for the most part the clearness, the brevity, the epigrammatic quality, of His sayings in the Synoptics ; it is often not easy to say where the words of Jesus end and those of the Evangelist begin. Is this Gospel less valuable for that reason? By no means ; for in this little book the Personality of the Master—His inner mind and purpose, the meaning of that Life which He had lived in the presence of His disciples, which had at first dazzled them by its brilliant detail, and which they could not as yet view in its symmetry and wholeness—are presented with convincing power, and we are made to feel that this was truly the Christ, the Son of the Living God, who revealed the Father, and brought Heaven within the horizon of Faith.

Let me put it into an illustration. Some years ago it was my privilege to visit the Mont Blanc region. My first impression of the "monarch of mountains" was from near at hand. In Chamonix only one gaunt shoulder of it is seen, and so foreshortened is the landscape that it is not easy to distinguish the actual peak from one or two of its

huge buttresses. At first, indeed, this, the topmost height of Europe, seemed scarcely real ; it hung like a dazzling cloud in the sky. A week's climbing along its slopes, however, gradually brought home its reality to the imagination. We climbed and climbed, yet seemed scarcely nearer the top ; ever heights beyond heights sprang as we rose, and ever deeper sank the sense of its tremendous range and majesty. The very glaciers that poured over its sides and wept their waters into the valleys seemed to despair of telling the story of its greatness ! But it was not till we left Chamonix behind us and reached Geneva that the supreme grandeur of Mont Blanc came fully home to the imagination. Near by, it oppresses and overwhelms the senses with its crushing force and detail. But from the edge of Lake Geneva, at a distance of forty miles or so, its grandeur comes home with irresistible power. Distance does not dwarf it ; the further you go the more do the surrounding heights sink down, and the higher the magnificent dome looms up on the horizon, till it stands in its pride of supremacy, dominating every object in the landscape like a crown of glory.

Now, that is the splendid function performed for us by the Gospel of John in relation to the Wonderful Life. In the Synoptics we see Jesus more from the view-point of His contemporaries, and we receive a deep impression of the reality and beauty of the story. We move with them through the matchless details of the story. But John's is the Geneva of the Gospels. He puts us in possession of the Divine significance and lofty perspectives of that great Life. The background here is not time, but eternity ; the facts of history are seen in their relation to the uncreated mysteries which were before

the foundation of the world, and which will remain when the world has been rolled up like a scroll, and has vanished, leaving "not a wrack behind." The Life here becomes the Light; the words are seen to find their deep significance from the Incarnate Word who spoke them; we behold His glory—"as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The revealing power of the Life shines forth in all its inner lustre. It is a unique revelation. It is an authoritative revelation. As Harnack says: "It is just this that stamped His peculiar genius—that He gave perfectly simple expression to profound and all-important truths, as though they could not be otherwise; as though He were uttering something that was quite self-evident; as though He were only reminding men of what they knew already, because it lives in the innermost part of their souls." The truths He came to deliver were as beautiful, "perhaps," before He spoke them; but since He gave them the seal of His authority, they have always seemed axiomatic, needing no proof, permitting of no question: they have become "yea and amen."

And how persuasive and beautiful this revelation of Jesus is! It is full of grace as well as truth. The best thoughts of great men grow commonplace at last. Those of Jesus burn with the lustre of the stars, unfading and constant through all generations. Everything is so artless, so unstudied, and yet so perfect both in expression and in meaning. When we turn from the life of to-day, as Dr. John Watson says, "with its platforms, committees, papers, meetings, where everyone is speaking at the pitch of his voice, and no one seems to be saying anything particular, and join the Master as He moves to and

fro establishing the Kingdom of God in individual lives, it is as when one escapes from a country fair, with its drums and shows, its gaudy wares and deafening noise, and finds himself in a country lane, where the wild roses brush him from the hedge, and birds overhead sing 'those songs that are so immemorial and so new'!"

III

The Wonderful Life as a Redemption.—A redemption! This is the final secret of Jesus. He came that we might have life, and that we might have it abundantly. He came that our own poor lives, broken on the wheel of circumstance, fissured by the consequences of our evil deeds and habits, envenomed by the virulent poison of sin, might be renewed through and through, and presented to the Father without spot or blemish or any such thing. This has ever been the effect of the Wonderful Life on the world when it has opened its heart to its influence—that the springs of its own life have been sweetened, clarified, and freshened to the core. For this was the central quality of this most Wonderful Life of which we are now speaking—that it has been the most communicable of all the lives that have ever been lived on earth.

And this is a most marvellous thing! We admire greatness in men usually because it is something so inimitable and unique. If it were common, it would not attract us; being something above and apart, it commands our homage—a homage in which there is a touch of despair. It must have been something of this feeling that made Peter cry out as he threw himself at his Master's feet: "Depart from me, O Lord, because I am a sinful man!" But the Lord refused

to leave His disciple for that very reason. It was what drew Him to men, and filled Him with passion for their souls—the desire to lift them up to His own level, to give them His own life of purity, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Jesus has proved that it is one of the features of the highest goodness—that it is easier to follow than any lower form. Jesus is more imitable than Paul, or Augustine, or Luther, because His holiness is purer, His love profounder, His grace more perfect, His life more blameless in its unstained beauty, than the life of the noblest, and holiest, and most gracious men the world has seen.

We come at the central redemptive element of the Life of Jesus, however, not in His life, but in His death. The Cross was the nadir of the career of Jesus as a Man, but it was the zenith of His achievement for the race. The eclipse of the human in Him was the revelation of the Divine. His despair is our freshest hope ; through the midnight of His mortal agony broke the noonday of our redemption. Calvary was the place where two seas met—man's sin and God's grace—and the shock of the conflict broke the heart of God's Son ; but the dire sorrow of His defeat was the turning point of the storm. And in the still air of the resurrection morning, when He came forth from the land of shadows (because " He could not be holden of death "), calling " All hail !" (while yet the dew of the grave was on His brow !), He announced the victory of everlasting love over every power that can destroy the soul.

The Cross must once more take its place as the centre of our Faith. It has been passing through a strange eclipse of recent years. Men have grown tired of the systems and theories that have been spun

round it, and have longed for anything that would save them from tiresome repetition and mechanical insistence on this or that essential feature of its efficacy. It is, indeed, small wonder that faith has wilted under the strain of these theories of the Atonement. And it will not recover its pulse till it comes back to the Cross itself and to Him who died thereon. We are not bound by any theory of the Cross. Nevertheless, we do ourselves sore injury if, because we do not accept this or that version of its meaning, we turn away from the Cross itself as though it lost its efficacy when we rejected man-made theories concerning it. Let it speak first, not to our intellect, but to our need; let the heart tell her tale before the brain begins to bring its logic to bear upon the mystery of its potent appeal. The first condition of coming to a theory of the Atonement that will meet the conditions of our own thought, is that we have a deep experience of its power and its emancipation. And that cannot be till we prostrate ourselves before the Love that was nailed to it, and that bore its shame and its horror for us and for all men. This has been so in all previous ages from the beginning. For it is Christ—the Eternal Son of God—dying on the Cross, which is the central fact of Christianity in all ages; and we may be sure that we shall not come to the secret of our forefathers' religion till that supreme fact has spoken to us as it did to them. "Jesus Christ died on the tree," said Carlyle to Emerson seventy years ago in Scotland, "that built Dunscore Kirk yonder, that brought you and me together." And whatever our ideas about it may be, brethren, it was that Cross that has built every church in Christendom, that has brought us together here to-night, and gives this gathering all its real spiritual significance.

But let me close with this—the life that was in Him who died on the Cross cannot become our life without our assent and co-operation, "And that believing, ye might have life in His name." Faith is the talisman that will open this secret door of blessing. And what is faith but this—friendship raised to its highest terms, "with all its loyalties, its trust, its passionate surrender of itself to the object of its regard"? Faith is the outgoing of the heart upwards in response to God in Christ as grace is the outflowing of His heart downwards to us in helpfulness. "Without faith"—this perfect flower of friendship, this receptiveness to the best that God can give us, that our best may become His—"it is impossible to please" Him; for it is the inalienable condition of benefiting by what Christ has done for us that we should love and trust Him to the uttermost for the efficacy of His Cross and the power of His Resurrection.

This is why Jesus always made large demands on the devotion of His people. It was the only condition on which He could redeem them. On the answer to His great question, "Lovest thou Me?" depends His power to save and keep every man. And so He asked for men's love; laid siege to their hearts; staked His all, as it were, on the chance of receiving back His own in passionate loyalty and affectionate obedience. On our response to this simple but imperious appeal depends the issue of our relation to Him. His Redemption can only become ours through the doorway of a love and obedience that opens wide enough to receive all He has to give us on the one hand, and all we can surrender to Him on the other.

III

THE DECAY OF DOCTRINAL PREACHING

(A Sermon to Preachers)

"For the bishop [*i.e.*, the overseer of the flock] must be blameless as God's steward . . . holding to the faithful word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in the sound [healthful] doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers."

Titus i. 7-10.

The implication of this passage is that it is a part of the function of the ministry to be an instrument for teaching the Church of Christ the essential truths of the Christian faith. It suggests a body of more or less systematised doctrine, a standard of validity, and a method of instruction, on the one side edifying and inspiring, and on the other defensive against rival forms of teaching. Believers are to be built up and established in their faith by a course of instruction in the central truths of religion as a part of their discipline. There are many other passages in the New Testament where the same duty is enforced or suggested, and from other sources we learn that this duty was earnestly and faithfully followed in the early Church. The "teacher" was as distinct a figure in the primitive community as was the evangelist, the organiser, the pastor or the Apostle.

It is a part of the disquieting situation with which we are face to face nowadays that the teaching function, properly so called, is largely in abeyance in the

Christian Church. Preaching is still one of the central functions of religion, and in some directions it is as potent an instrument of influence as ever it was. Books about religion pour forth copiously from the press, and they are eagerly read and studied by the few who are interested in the theoretic aspects of the spiritual life. There is more material for the exposition of our religion in all its myriad aspects than at any other point of its long and eventful history. None the less is there a widespread distaste for discourses which deal with the great truths of religion, and as widespread a neglect of them.

"Doctrinal" preachers as such are at a discount. Those who attend public worship appear to crave for nothing less than for instruction in the deep things of God. The popular cry is for an obvious evangelism, or for the practical application of Christianity to the problems of the individual or of society, or for a half-philosophical, half-mystical "criticism of life." There is a place for all these forms of preaching ; but apart from the tremendous and soul-moving verities which lie at the back of every true evangelical appeal, and of all the ethical and mystical aspects of religion, there is little in average Christian thought and life that is distinctive or permanent. There is a perennial call for the exposition of this great body of truth, without which religion becomes a hard and shallow moralism, or a weak and easily exhausted sentimentalism.

I

It would be well to glance at some of the reasons for this neglect of doctrinal teaching in the Church of to-day.

1. Undoubtedly it is partly due to the sense of

unreality and aloofness from practical life of much of the teaching of the past. The Christian faith has too often been presented as a complete, logical, harmonious system of doctrine with a consistency and a beauty all its own, but too much out of relation to the actual lives of men. "Bodies" of divinity have been apt to have no "soul" in them. Their very consistency has been one of their most trying qualities. They have allowed no room for the fact that life is full of problems that no reason can solve, and of mysteries that have no explanation. A system of thought which is self-contained, and which is out of touch with the surge and tumult of the world's thought and experience, is self-condemned. The only remedy that men have against such an infliction is to pass it by as ineffectual and otiose. The true place for such "systems" of divinity is among the curiosities of thought. Their interest is purely historical. When one looks round the shelves of a college library and notes the serried ranks of such works, one wonders at their historic interest and their present futility. Doubtless they register the fact that brave thinkers have from time to time made the Sisyphean attempt in theology, as others have done in philosophy, to reduce the mighty processes of religion to a "plan," and so far they call for respect; none the less, they account for much of the distaste which the modern world, whose view of the universe is so full of "loose ends," feels towards the "Queen of the Sciences," as though it were something fatally doctrinaire and unpractical.

2. The technical and remote phraseology of such doctrinal preaching as survived into the last century (with notable exceptions) greatly increased this prejudice. Living thought needs living language to

express it, and ancient terms have often been a mere refuge for haziness or laziness of mind in the preacher. We cannot adequately express our own problems and our own solutions in the phrases of bygone centuries ; and though there are central and time-honoured terms in theology as in other departments of thought that can never grow old, because they represent abiding facts and experiences, the language in which the processes of thought are handled in the pulpit should be at least as modern as is needful to give clearness and actuality to the ideas for which they stand. The dignity of the pulpit demands that its speech should be worthy of its message, and the mere catch-words of the hour are to be avoided ; but its message is to living men, and its language should be the language of living thought.

3. But there are deeper reasons for the avoidance of the great Christian doctrines in the modern pulpit. The world of thought is passing through a "sea-change" more radical than within human memory, and the truths of religion have not escaped the universal unsettlement. The Christian Faith has always been a subject of controversy and attack from outside. The distinctive feature of the present situation is that it is being examined from within, and with an independence of scrutiny and a thoroughness of method that is a new fact in the history of religion. The mind of believers has been suddenly emancipated from the thraldom of creeds and councils, and from traditional points of view. It is freely recognised that the "origins" of our Faith must pass through the same tests of historical criticism as any other narratives of the past, sacred and profane ; and it is beginning to be recognised that this process may have results as drastic and revolutionary for dogma

as for other departments of religious thought. It is thus no wonder that preachers should feel less confidence in expounding the historic doctrines of the Church than in times when the facts behind these doctrines, and which alone give them their validity, were accepted at what may be called their "face value." Till these facts have been once more vindicated, or restated in their scientific form, it has not been possible to speak with confidence of their doctrinal implications, and a certain reserve, begotten of a natural modesty and an honourable reticence, inevitably results from this situation. In the meantime most preachers feel they must limit themselves to the secondary aspects of religious truth—a contraction of function which, however intelligible as a temporary expedient, cannot but interfere with the free handling of their subject and the full effectiveness of their message.

4. The present temper of the pew falls in naturally with this attitude of the pulpit. It is an age of hurry and unrest. Men are being harried and hunted during the week by the anxieties and excitements of business and social life. They thus have little leisure and less inclination for patient and serious thinking. They have so much to think about on weekdays that they do not care to be forced into a mood of strenuous and patient thought on their one day of rest. The preaching they love to hear is that which deals with obvious things in an obvious way. The man who would be popular must be impressionist rather than profound, obvious rather than suggestive. The crowd avoids the thinker who tries their patience and demands close attention because he deals with the profound realities of faith. Preachers would be more than human if they showed

no tendency to yield to this constant and subtle pressure.

5. Another reason completes the indictment: The test of the value of dogma is found in its power to produce men and women of robust and noble character, and this test apparently leads to very disturbing results. There are many who make a full profession of the Christian creed who seem to be little affected ethically by their ostensible beliefs, and many of the most estimable characters are found among those who fail conscientiously to accept those beliefs, and are thus reckoned among sceptics or unbelievers. Great beliefs should make great men. This pragmatic test is by no means the only, nor is it the safest, criterion of the validity of religious truth, but for the moment it is the only one which the average man is willing to apply. Did not the Great Teacher say, "By their fruits ye shall know them"? What value can those beliefs have which fail to fructify in a man's inner being, or to bring forth "the peaceable fruits of righteousness"? None for him. Nevertheless, truth does not depend on its exponents for its criterion or its validity; and though all men were hypocrites, professing great beliefs which they failed to incarnate in their lives, it would be their conduct that was blameworthy, not their creed. When great truths are greatly held and heartily followed, they cannot fail to ennoble and to inspire those who are thus loyal to them; yet would they be none the less great and none the less valid though all the world were faithless to them. Did Judas invalidate the Sermon on the Mount because he was a traitor to his Master in the hour of need? Is the Gospel less true because so many professing Christians have been found unworthy of

their trust in every succeeding generation? Nay. Nor does the fact that so many unbelievers have been conspicuous for Christian virtue prove the independence of creed and character. Many of them were brought up during the formative period of their training under Christian influences, and all of them under the diffused influences of the religion whose tenets they afterwards rejected. It is impossible thus to isolate ourselves from our spiritual environment, or so to distinguish the operative elements of our spiritual education as to be able to rule off so large a factor as Christianity has always been in the training of men's character in the Western world. All we can safely say is that profession and practice do not by any means always go together, and that a man is often better as well as worse than his overt creed. We must judge of the value of religious beliefs by their normal effect on those who hold them sincerely and obey them heartily and consistently, and when this is done there can be no question or doubt as to the facts. That the ethical standards of true Christians are the highest, and the type of character they present is the noblest, the world has seen, is proved by the ready and salutary scorn visited on those who profess a creed so exalted when their conduct is unworthy of their profession. The loftiness of the creed, and the difficulty of realising its beauty and holiness in practice, make this attitude both ready and misleading. It is easy to satirise those who aim at an "impossible" ideal, however far they may rise above the average ethical standards of their age.

II

These are the chief reasons why the exposition of Christian doctrines has become almost a lost art in

present-day preaching, and why the emphasis has been changed from the central truths of our Faith to its secondary and ancillary aspects. They do not, however, justify the fact, nor do away with the consequent comparative failure of the modern pulpit. It is impossible to ignore the serious loss to Christian life involved in this condition of things.

1. In the first place, religion can never assert its full authority over a mind that ignores its intellectual appeal. As man is a thinking being, every department of his complex life must have its intellectual expression. Now doctrine is the intellectual aspect of the religious life. It is the theory of which conduct is the expression, and character the embodiment. It is the synthesis of the relations of God, man, and the universe, expressed as spiritual truth. No man's religion, therefore, can be satisfying to himself, or completely operant and effective for his good, unless he is able to give it some intellectual form and content. It is not necessary that this form should be logically complete and without flaw, but it is at least essential that it should be pursued as far into the realm of clear thought as is possible and valid. It is the sincerity and honesty of the effort, not the finality of the result, that ultimately counts. The efforts of the greatest thinkers to formulate the primal mysteries of the spiritual life into a system of thought are among the highest achievements of the human intellect. That they have failed to compass its vast realities and fathomless content is only a proof that man is not the measure of God, and that there are mysteries even in his own nature which baffle the wisest and the best. The discipline of character and the enlargement of outlook which the sincere effort to think out his religion bring to a man are a part

of his reward. Just as intercourse with our dearest friends deepens our affection for them, and rivets more and more closely our relationship, so is our communion with the Eternal enriched, and our reverence for things Divine enhanced as we strive to plumb the mysterious relations between us and Him and to search out "the deep things of God." There is no region where a richer harvest of practical good is gained than in the ample fields of religious thought.

2. The need for a fresh enthusiasm for the intellectual study and exposition of religious reality is seen, further, in the fact that in other directions men are busily engaged in intellectual research. There has been no period in the history of our race marked by keener activity in the study of Nature and of man than the present. The constitution of matter and mind, and their relations; the story of cosmic development in its myriad ramifications; the origins of life, its slow and tortuous evolution from simple to complex, from low to high, from monad to man; the antiquity of the human race; the beginnings of history; the fate of races, nations, and empires; the nature and origin of religions, their manifold content, affinities, and contrasts; the historical beginnings and antecedents of our own faith, its debt to previous forms of belief, its developments of thought, ritual, and life, its present relations to rival or related faiths —these are only some of the lines along which human investigation has been proceeding, with rich and abundant results, during the past century. In the best and truest sense all these scientific results are but added materials for the fresh and earnest study of the Christian creed. It may be said, perhaps, that it is impossible at present to assimilate a tithe of these results for our purpose, and that theology in its

technical sense must have time to work them into an ordered synthesis before it is possible to present any of the final issues to our congregations; and in a sense this is true. None the less, it is time to make a beginning, or at least to show that, whatever modifications may be necessary in the ultimate restatement of Christian doctrine, the central truths of our religion are neither overturned nor vitally altered. To act otherwise is to let our case go by default, and to deal a fatal blow to the faith of thousands of anxious souls who are tossed and turned by every wind of doctrine, and left without anchorage for their faith, or satisfying guidance for the voyage of life.

3. To add to the difficulties of the average believer he is met by a multitude of rival creeds, some of which are but resuscitated versions of discredited beliefs of the past, others being newly formulated expressions of vagrant religious impulses, but all of which appeal confidently for acceptance, on the ground that they claim to be modern syntheses of life, necessitated by the new science and philosophy of the time. It is the duty of the Christian preacher to present his case, in view of these rival creeds, with patience and care and conviction. This is not the first time that Christianity has had to pass such an ordeal. In its first inception it had to fight for its right to acceptance against the determined and long-continued efforts of other faiths to replace it, or to assimilate it. The first triumph of the Christian creed was a signal instance of the survival of the fittest in the realm of religious thought. Its early exponents were men who possessed the full culture of their times, and who presented their case with a breadth and subtlety, an insight and a conviction,

without which Christianity would unquestionably have been submerged during those strenuous centuries by successive waves of evanescent syncretistic beliefs. We owe its ultimate triumph not only to the martyrs of the catacombs and the noble lives of successive generations of believers, but to the splendid intellectual supremacy of such theologians as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, Tertullian, and Augustine. This triumph has been repeated at each period of crisis in the history of thought, and it must be so again to-day if Christianity is to survive in the confusions and tumults of modern thought. The supreme need of the hour is the need of great theologians at our centres of learning, and of great preachers in our pulpits, possessing a combined culture and faith that will repeat the achievements of the early centuries in the field of thought. No religion can hope to survive the attacks of unbelief unless it can thus ultimately commend itself to the human mind as a tenable and convincing system of belief.

4. Meanwhile other evils must result unless this need be met. The Christian position is being caricatured as well as attacked, old and discredited versions of its doctrines are being assailed as though they were the only tenable forms of belief, and imperfect and one-sided versions of its doctrines are being expounded in their place. Pseudo-scientific and philosophic systems of thought, that are Christian only in name, are freely offered in popular form to men who feel that old-fashioned "orthodoxy" has ceased to appeal to them, and these are being hastily accepted. In such schemes there is no historic root and no principle of finality, and they succeed each other with perplexing rapidity, to the undoing of the

faith of many. Is it any wonder that other bewildered souls seek a refuge from the unrest of the hour in a shallow revivalism or an obscurantist faith? If our Churches were better instructed in the essentials of the Christian religion, those parasitic or outworn forms of faith would find fewer votaries, and the sense of disillusionment, which is so widespread and disturbing a feature of the religious world, would not be so painfully manifest. An instructed ministry, full of faith, courage, and zeal, is the one sovereign remedy for all these ills. We must not forget that light is one of the prime sources of power in the spiritual as in the physical life.

IV

THEOLOGY AS A SUBJECT OF PERENNIAL INTEREST

"Which things the angels desire to look into."—1 Peter i. 12.

The meaning of the Apostle here is that the mysteries of the Kingdom of God are matters of such cardinal importance and of such final value that the very angels of God are deeply interested in them. Celestial thinkers, as well as earthly, love to discourse upon this Gospel. There are conferences above as well as below on its holy doctrines and profound problems and far-reaching solutions—"which things the angels desire to look into."

This belief in the boundless significance of the Gospel as a scheme of salvation is in keeping with the attitude of the New Testament writers throughout. The story of Jesus as given to us in the Gospels is full of references to the profound and joyful interest taken in it in the Unseen World. According to the Evangelists, an angel heralded the coming of Jesus to Mary his Mother; angels sang their hymn at the Nativity, breaking forth, as by an irresistible impulse of joy, in glory round the shepherds as they watched their flocks on the hill-slopes of Bethlehem; a voice from heaven cried out at the Baptism, "This is My well-beloved Son, hear ye Him"; angels came into the midnight agony

at Gethsemane, strengthening Jesus for the final ordeal of the Cross ; angels visited the earthly grave, crying, "He is not here ; He is risen." It was a cloud of angels that received Him into glory. Everywhere a sense of spiritual presences, of supernal visitants, of a heavenly choir, watching, helping, sympathising, rejoicing, in the course of this wondrous story from its cradle prologue to its celestial climax ! And here we have a suggestion that as these supernal beings, interested in all that takes place here below, but supremely interested in this story which was to be the turning-point of history, were also profoundly moved with longing to look into and master and understand its larger significance. "Which things" —the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow—"the angels desire to look into."

The world in its present mood makes short work of the doctrine of angels, relegating them to the sphere of superstition and spiritual phantasy. We need not trouble ourselves now about that question. What is quite clear, at least, is this—that the New Testament writers were filled with the conviction that the deep mysteries and soaring truths of the Gospel have a meaning for all pure and holy beings who may inhabit the Unseen World. So boundless is its significance, so commanding its importance, so far-reaching its effects, that its interest spreads into every sphere of spiritual being, and thrills all heavenly intelligences with its absorbing and fadeless interest. Here is a subject of investigation worthy of the attention and close study of all hierarchies of being, all scales of intelligence, from the simplest convert on earth to the highest archangels of heaven!

My subject, then, is the central interest for all worlds, and, therefore, pre-eminently for this world,

of religion, and also of theology as the science of religion. I am conscious that I am not dealing with a popular subject. There was a time when theology was universally recognised as the queen of the sciences, the climax and crown of all knowledge. But since the time when Thomas Aquinas, in the heyday of the Middle Ages, gathered up into his "Summa Theologica" the cream of thought of all previous religious thinking as a textbook of theology, there has been a slow, gradual, and disastrous waning of interest in this high theme. To-day we are even invited to consider the contrast, if not contradiction, between what is called science and what is called theology, as though theology were not a science at all. Many go even beyond that, and speak of religion itself as though it were something to be set over against theology. We preachers are told that the more religion we preach, and the less theology, the better we shall get on, the more people will come to hear us, the more popular we shall be. The most sensational evangelist has more chance of getting a crowd than the noblest theologian. The queen of the sciences has not only been dethroned, she has become a drudge in her Father's household.

I am not prepared to say that this changed attitude has not its reasons, and to some extent its justification. I will not deny that theologians are partly, perhaps largely, to blame for this catastrophe, and that a theology which is divorced from life is rightly doomed to exile and disgrace. There is a long story behind this which it would be sad to tell. None the less, the neglect of theology, not among the experts—for that has never been true—but among thoughtful laymen, and especially among preachers of the Word of God, is a profound misfortune, and it is this that

largely accounts for the present-day relaxed interest in religion itself. For what is theology? It is careful and ordered thought about religion; it is the attempt to express the essence of religion for the mind, as evangelism makes its appeal to the heart, that its principles may be grasped, its doctrines mastered, and the duties flowing from its study realised in all their length and breadth. That is what theology is. As such it is a living subject: it is a matter of universal, practical, every-day importance; it is the most absorbing, interesting, commanding, of all subjects for us here on earth, and for all angels and principalities in heaven.

I

I will venture to present three reasons for this:

1. In the first place, theology deals with the greatest realities in the Universe. What are these realities? They are God, the world, and man himself.

Let us begin with the world in which we find ourselves. It spreads itself before, around, above us with its teeming facts, its unvarying laws, its perpetual pressure and appeal to sense, and feeling, and thought. It is the inescapable environment of life everywhere. The physical sciences deal with the nature of the matter by which it is composed, with the laws that govern it, with the story of its evolution from the far beginnings of time. The biological sciences deal with the living creatures that reside in it—their inception, their becoming, their habits, the conditions of their life, their relations one to another. The mental sciences deal with the emergence and the laws of mind and consciousness. Philosophy sums up all these sciences into a synthesis, examining into their basis, their relations to one another, and their final

significance as ordered expressions of the totality of experience.

So far so good. But whence came this physical and living universe? Can we learn anything concerning its source, its order, and its end? Is mind a mere function of matter? Is matter the fruit of a universal mind? Is there a living conscious Ruler and Lawgiver to this wonderful realm of reality? Is the world only a drift of atoms, whirling endlessly in space, combining and building themselves here into a mountain, there into a mouse, now into a crystal, and again into a man, according to mere material laws, with no presiding intelligence to rule it, no supreme will to guide it, all rising out of nothingness, only to fall back into nothingness at last? Here is something no science can tell us, a riddle no philosophy can solve. For the answer we must go to another oracle. Religion alone can tell us that. Now religion is a name for all the feeling, thought, and insight on these problems which come to us from the Unseen, and theology is only the intelligent and intelligible results which thought builds out of the revelation provided us in religion. And what religion finds is God, where the materialist can find only matter; and theology is the science of God in His being, His attributes, and His relations to the universe, which is the outcome of His creative power, the sphere of His all-wise government.

And Man, who finds himself in the world and face to face with God—What is he? Whence came he? What is his place, function, duty, now that he is here? Whither goes he? Is he only a more highly organised animal whose fate is to perish with the animals around him? Is he the mere result of a chance dance of atoms which have produced him and

will destroy him without intention or knowledge? Or is he a spirit who is uniquely related to the universal Spirit, from whom all things proceed, and to whom they tend? Is he altogether earthbound? Does he—the essential man—perish with his body? Or has he a future beyond the grave? And what is his spiritual condition by nature? Is he as God meant him to be? If not, what is hindering him? What is this malady of sin that doth so easily beset him and keep him back from realising his ideal self? And how is he to escape from its bondage? What is salvation? What is the secret of reconciliation with God? What is the meaning of the New Birth? In what way does the Cross save? These are the great questions of religion, and they are the subject-matter of Christian theology.

Can there be more interesting and important questions in all the Universe of God for serious men and women? Is there anything more important than to get answers to them, and such answers as are true and convincing? Can anything be unimportant or uninteresting that contributes to their answer? I trow not. And, as a matter of fact, there is nothing in the world more interesting to any of us than these questions, and such answers to them as we can get. These are the problems that have occupied the human mind from prehistoric times, and they do so still. They only lose interest to those who have ceased to think about them, or fail to get answers to them that appear true and satisfying. All that is needful to make them live again is that they should be dealt with in a real, frank, ample, and experimental way.

A year or two ago it was my privilege to spend a Sunday in a New England town. The evening service took the form of what is there called an "Open Forum" meeting. A well-known theological

professor delivered a popular lecture on "Can the modern man be religious?" which lasted an hour. The audience, which thronged the building, was clearly composed largely of non-churchgoers, some of whom were so unaccustomed to religious services that they scarcely recognised the conventions of the place and occasion. When the lecture was over the speaker announced that he was open freely to answer any questions that might be put to him. These were sent up to the pulpit in large numbers. I was interested to note the character of these questions, which were chiefly put, not by the ordinary religious man, but by those who made no religious profession. And they were just the questions that have perennially occupied the thoughts of all great thinkers on religion. "What do you mean by God?" . . . "How do you know that you know anything about Him?" . . . "What about prayer?" . . . "Is there another life?" . . . "What is meant by calling Jesus Divine?" . . . "Is there an unending hell?" . . . "Does death end our chances?" And so on. All this clearly proved that the problems of religion, which theology has been trying to solve throughout the ages, are not dead problems for the modern man, but are just those that he is most deeply interested in; and if the churches where these problems are discussed are not attended as they ought to be, it is not because these problems have lost their importance, but because, for some reason or other, the public has lost confidence in the manner in which they are treated by the modern preacher. How to regain the confidence of those who have ceased to attend Divine worship as at present conducted is therefore a very vital and important matter; but that is a question I cannot deal with here.

2. Then, secondly, the absorbing interest of religion

on its intellectual—*i.e.*, its theological—side is seen in the fact that such views as we hold in the problems of religion utterly determine the quality, character, and value of our lives. For these problems are not merely of intellectual interest, they have a profoundly practical side. What we think about life determines what we do with life. Our conception of the meaning of the world we live in, and of the Being who made it, and of ourselves who find ourselves here, will settle the kind of men and women we become. It makes no difference to this whether we think our way through our difficulties or refuse to do so: not to think is the same as thinking wrongly. For we have to live our lives somehow, and if we refuse to live in the light, we must perish in the dark. Those who are not Christians must be something, and that something implies some kind of attitude to the problems in question. It is impossible for you, then, to escape this issue: you must either stumble through the world, religiously blind, helpless, irrational, or walk through it in such light as you can get. So you must have some kind of religion, positive or negative, and therefore you must have some kind of theology, or view of religion, to bless you or to curse you. Does it, then, make no difference to people whether they do or do not believe there is a God? Is duty the same to the man who believes he will live for ever as it is to him who thinks he will die like the beast that perisheth? It is impossible that this should be. And therefore theology, or "ordered thought about religion," is not a matter you can "take or leave." You must take up some attitude—emotional, volitional, mental—to these in escapable problems; and your attitude on this matter will determine what manner of man you are to your life's end and in the great Hereafter.

3. Thirdly, it is a matter of fact that all the living questions of religion for all of us circle round the personality of the most potent and interesting Being who ever lived on earth—Jesus Christ. No one surely can deny that Jesus Christ is the most interesting personality the world has ever seen. It is a fact that every science, and every form of philosophy, and every social order that have been formulated since He was on earth has been profoundly affected by His teaching, His work, His person. History in a truly universal human sense began with Jesus Christ; and thought began again with Him. His coming awakened a new outlook for humanity in every sphere of action and being. If He were removed from the memory of men, the whole fabric of our Western civilisation would fall to pieces; it would have to be reconstituted from its foundations. In a very true sense it may be said that this war is the result of a temporary attempt to dethrone Him from the central place in the modern world's thought and life, and its solution will depend for its character and its permanence on whether we give Him the determining word in the settlement of peace. "A new world after the war"? That will depend on whether we put Jesus Christ on the throne, and hand Him the sceptre of the world's government. If we do so—well; if not, the world's future history will be coloured—nay, determined—by that fact to the remotest end of time! This is not rhapsody, it is plain, sober sense, and we all know it.

II

So the question returns to us with a new meaning: What kind of thought are we to have about religion in the future? Let us look at our text again. "Which things the angels desire to look

into." This is not a very good translation. If we examine the Greek text of the passage we shall find a remarkable image here. "Which things the angels try by stooping low to look into, but cannot except in the most superficial way"—that is the full sense of the phrase. The word suggests a bird when on the wing glancing in under an obstruction and catching a dim and passing glimpse of something hidden there and then skimming on its way. The "angels desire to look into these things"—but, somehow, they cannot. Why not? Let us attempt to make it plainer through another illustration. I have somewhere seen a picture of an angel at the Crucifixion. The crowd have vanished; the body of the Saviour has been taken down; the Cross stands bare against the sky; there is only the filmy translucent figure of the angel standing there. He has picked up the crown of thorns which was lying on the ground, and is looking at it with a kind of awed and puzzled curiosity. And he is trying to feel the sharp spines of the thorns with his ghostly fingers. But he cannot feel them. He has not the human body, the sensitive physical organ, that would enable him to enter into the experience of the Saviour's agony. He can dimly guess at it, but he cannot *know* how it felt to wear that crown of thorns, and to hang on that Cross, and to feel the poignant agony of the nails and the thrust of the spear in his side. Supposing such a being were to attempt a theology of the Cross? It would be a secret beyond him, for lack of the experience. "Which things the angels desire to look into—but cannot."

Is there no hint here of the reason why so much of our theology, or theory of religion, has been so poor and thin and futile in the past, and why it has so little power to-day? There have been too many

"angelic doctors" in the past who have dabbled in theology without having the religious experience that would qualify them for its proper treatment. For, as religion is a matter of experience, no one can deal fairly and with any sense of reality with its subject-matter who has not felt the practical stress of its need, the emancipating power of its influence, and the joy of its salvation in his own life. Nay, was not this one of the central motives of the Incarnation? Was it not needful for the Son of God to become man that he might Himself feel in our own nature the stress of temptation and the need of Divine help, ere He Himself could become a true Saviour? Yes "verily He took" upon Himself, "not the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham," and "was made of a woman and under the law" . . . "that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted."

And shall we solve the hard enigmas of religion and attain to a true theology of salvation unless we go through the crucial experiences of temptation, suffering, and salvation ourselves? That is the secret of theology—experience of redemption. It is the one essential qualification of the preacher—that he should himself be a saved man. The school in which we preachers must all graduate is this—a feeling of need, a longing for deliverance, a sense of escape, a realisation that "there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Let all keep silent who have not had this blessed experience; let them say nothing, write nothing, about the Christian religion, for they know nothing about it, as it should and must be known. But if they do, then let them shout their

deliverance on the house-tops, and speak of it in the high places, and men will listen to them, for they will at once recognise the voice of the prophet, the thinker, the theologian who has a message to deliver, because he is a new creature in Christ Jesus, for whom "all things have been made new."

The theology of the future must thus be an experimental theology, and then it will be interesting, arresting, and commanding in its power. For the life of the thinker on religion

> "is not as idle ore,
> But iron dug from central gloom,
> And heated hot with burning fears,
> And dipt in baths of hissing tears,
> And batter'd with the shocks of doom
> To shape and use."

Angels cannot see into these great mysteries from above, however they may desire to do so; they must first be experienced below, and then they can be grasped in all their grandeur, felt in all their emancipating power, and handled with knowledge and competence—but not otherwise. The best theology of the ages is the rich outcome of the faith of the ages. It is that, and that alone, that gives the historic creeds their authority. It is that, and that alone, that can give authority to any word preached from this or any other pulpit. Theology must have the marks of fire, the scars of battle, and the stigma of the Lord Jesus upon it. That is why St. Paul's letters still pulse with power, and the books of Origen, Augustine, Luther, Wesley, take their rank among the fadeless classics of the soul. And it is that alone which will give any preacher, as he breaks the bread of life from week to week in this or any other church, his mandate, his influence, and his success.

V

THE ALLEGED FAILURE OF CHRISTIANITY

MATT. XXIII. 27-8.

THESE great and pathetic words are usually understood as proving the Divine strength and beauty of the Saviour's love for the people who a little later did Him cruelly to death; and we are right in so taking them. This was the great heart which they presently broke; this was the boundless love they rejected; this was the noble spirit whom they would not suffer any longer to live in their midst! He would have gathered them unto his bosom; they nailed Him to the Cross. He cried out to them, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest"; they cried out, "Away with Him; crucify Him!" With the death-dew on his brow He said, "Father forgive them; they know not what they do"; they mocked at Him as He hung between earth and heaven, saying, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." Truly—

"When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

"See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?"

I do not, however, propose just now to look at these words from this point of view. I want to bring before you a less winsome and attractive aspect of them. Have you ever considered these words, not as proof of the unfathomable depth and unconquerable persistence of the Saviour's love, but of His sad failure as regards His own nation? Such, in sooth, was the issue of that unique ministry of Jesus, with the unspeakable beauty of its teaching, with its wonderful deeds of mercy, with its outgoings of Divine pity and grace! So far as the nation at large went, it was a failure; "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." The people to whom He preached, whose sicknesses He healed, whose souls He illuminated, whom He called out of darkness into the marvellous light of His Gospel—these people openly and scornfully rejected Him; nay, they spurned and slew Him. He had come that they might have life, and they preferred death. At his touch heaven's portals opened wide; they turned their backs upon it all, and plunged into the deep hell of a self-chosen damnation. And so "their house was left to them desolate." Surely, if all we knew of Jesus and His fate was what is here told us, we should say that of all the great and final tragedies of history this was the cruellest and most unredeemed of all. He confessed, indeed, that he had failed; it was the bitterest drop in His cup of woe that he had done so. Whatever victories might lie for him beyond (and through) the Cross on which he died, His life had been spent for naught so far as that nation was concerned for which He had occupied His days in unremitting toil, and His nights in unbroken prayer. "How often . . . and ye would not!"

The Alleged Failure of Christianity

I

The Accusation of Failure.—Why do I dwell here on this strange and disquieting fact? Because once more we hear it said, and with a persistence which carries home a deep disturbance to many minds, that Christianity is a failure. The other day, in a working-man's paper, it was scornfully asserted that the religion of Jesus was to be accounted among the discarded faiths of the world; that it had no message for the modern man; that after all these centuries of preaching, and teaching, and persecution, and revival, and reaction, it must be numbered among the spent forces of life. The writer appealed to the facts of present-day society for his proof; he pointed to the squalor, the crime, the drunkenness, the harlotry of our modern cities; to the fierce pursuit of wealth, the mad race for pleasure, the quenchless thirst for sensation even among the educated classes; to the open war between the classes and the masses, to the wide extremes of luxury and poverty that shame our social fabric; to the lukewarmness of professing Christians, and the steady decline of our Churches; finally, to the terrible and tragic struggle which is desolating Europe. If this be a divine religion, with the power of God behind it, how is it that it has not managed to win its way to victory long ere this? For nearly 2,000 years it has been striving to conquer the world in the name of its Lord and Master; and here we are to-day, with not a fourth of the world evangelised, and that fourth in the condition just described! Is any further proof wanted that Christianity is a failure?

Now the facts are indisputable; perhaps we could put them even more strongly, and yet keep within

the limits of truth. And the facts must bear heavily on the heart of every lover of its kind, and especially on the hearts of those who confess the name of Christ and are engaged in His service. Who that keeps an open mind to the condition of the world just now can feel happy at the sight? Who can fail to feel deeply apprehensive—humanly speaking—for the future? Truly, we are not on the flow, but (for the time at least) on the slack of the tide. There are many whose hearts are failing within them for fear of what lies before our Churches and our faith in this twentieth century, with its revolutions of thought and its convulsions of life, and its deep disquietudes of soul. The old order appears to be breaking up, and the shore lines of the new are not even in sight, looming through the mists of the future. How are we, who still believe in Jesus Christ, and in the all-conquering name which is His, to face this situation? And what shall we say to it?

II

The First Condition of Success.—Let us return to our text and start from there.

1. In pondering over the failure of Jesus, we come first of all to the steadfast conclusion that, whose ever fault it was, the fault was none of His. All that such wisdom, and love, and pity, and appeal as His, on behalf of men's souls, could do, had been done. He could re-echo the prophet's words with conviction: "And now judge ye between me and my vineyard. What more could be done to my vineyard that has not been done to it!" And if we are to judge from our records as to the quality and force and winsomeness of this Great Soul's service, whether as Teacher, Preacher,

Healer, Friend, Saviour, then we say the force of "love Divine, all loves excelling," could no further go; or, at least, there was but one step more than it could make, and that was to seal the perfect life, and the perfect service, with the perfect death. Nor did even that gather these stubborn people unto His fold.

2. Another thing which comes into clear light in these records is this—that there was no failure in the message of Christ to those who did receive it. The little band of disciples who listened to His call, and who gathered willingly under the wing of His great love, found in Him all He had promised, and more than they had hoped. He made life altogether new to them. Heaven for them was bluer, and earth was greener, and God nearer, and everything fuller of hope and brightness because of the friendship and help of Jesus. He had turned their weakness into strength, and the sadness of their despair into the joy of morning. When, one day, forsaken by the great men of His time, He turned to the dwindling band of His faithful followers, He said to them, "Will ye also go away?" they one and all echoed the reply, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

And is it not a fact, bedded into the deepest experiences of the human soul, that ever since, when the Gospel of Jesus has been truly welcomed by anyone, and the great surrender to Him has been made, it has never yet been found a failure? I can appeal to the heartfelt testimony of innumerable believers in all ages, that the more thoroughly they have tested the promises of the Saviour, and sheltered under His Cross, and cultivated His fellowship, and obeyed His commands, the more profoundly has the Faith been vindicated in their experience, and proved to be

God's Yea and Amen. "For (if) the preaching of the Cross is to them that perish (because they have rejected it) foolishness; unto us that believe it is the power of God" (1 Cor. i. 18). If Christianity is a failure, it is only such to those who have rejected it or neglected it, or refused to put it to the test.

3. And so we come to a third conclusion as regards the failure of Jesus—that if so, it was the fault of those who did so reject it. This is the underlying source of sorrow in these words of the Saviour: "And ye would not!" If they had listened and believed and obeyed, what would have happened to the city of Jerusalem? Exactly what happened to Peter, and John, and James, and Martha, and Mary, and the Magdalene, and Zacchæus—that day would salvation have come into her streets and righteousness into her palaces. But because they would not, "their house was left to them desolate."

It comes to this—that to ensure the success of the Gospel, two conditions must be fulfilled. The offer must be made, and it must be accepted. The offer is a promise of pardon, reconciliation, friendship with God and man, power to be the men and women we ought to be—a present full of victorious spiritual energy, a future full of peace and promise. But this offer cannot avail without response, and the response must be not a matter of compulsion, but of willinghood. "How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings"—of all generations since then was this as true as of the moment when these words fell from the lips of Jesus. If, then, they "would not," and if they "will not" to-day, is that His fault, or the fault of those who refuse to come, that they may find forgiveness and life?

III

A religion of Free Will.—We are now in a position to test the statement that Christianity has failed a little more accurately.

1. It is, to begin with, a spiritual religion, and the spiritual world is the world of freedom, not of compulsion. In the sphere of politics you can compel obedience by making disobedience practically impossible. There are ways of forcing men to obey the outward laws of life. If you refuse to enlist in the army, you can be made a conscript. But force has no meaning in the sphere of religion. You can imprison a man's body, or stretch it on the rack, or kill it, but you cannot, and even God cannot, imprison a man's soul. That is a kingdom which can never be forced. Consent is the only key to the citadel of the will, and that key can only be turned from the inside. And, therefore, if a man will not be saved, neither man nor God can save him. Is this a disability? At least it is the only possibility. Though God besieged my soul with all the might of the angelic hosts behind Him to do His bidding, they would be helpless against my unwillingness to give in. This power He has delegated to me in virtue of my free spiritual nature; and though He can destroy my soul in hell, He cannot force it into heaven. So much of His omnipotence has He surrendered when He made the first soul, and He cannot go back on His word.

When, therefore, men taunt us who believe with failure to win the whole world to our side, we turn round on them, and ask whether this proves anything save that the men have failed who have refused to try it. Christianity claims to be a universal religion —*i.e.*, a religion adapted to the needs of every class

and grade of human being, cultured or ignorant, rich or poor, civilised or barbarian, good or bad. Its claims have been responded to by many who have belonged to all these classes, and they have found it mighty to save, all-powerful to redeem, a never-failing treasure of truth and grace and conquest over all the ills that flesh and soul are heir to. The experiment has been tried all these centuries by countless thousands of souls, and it has never failed those who have given their lives wholly to its keeping. The medicine is equal to the disease in all its phases. But it can only benefit those who accept it. To charge Christianity with failure, therefore, is to indict the race with failure. It is we who come short, not God, who has made the offer of life to us through His dear Son, and who, having made it, can but wait till we receive it to our hearts.

2. But there is more than this to be said. When we say that Christianity has been tried for nearly two thousand years, and mourn because it is still only the religion of a remnant of the race, they imply that there ought to have been a cumulative effect from age to age, which in the end should overflow and annex the world itself. Well, it is the hope of all true Christians that this will be so in time, but not for that reason. It is true that every age of faith makes it easier for the next to be an age of faith. The influence of the Christian Church, and the Christian family, and the Christian community, tend to become stronger with each generation of believers. And yet this does not go right home to the centre of things. The Church, the family, the community, are, after all, only the environment into which every new soul is born; they are not the soul itself. They are not, I say, the soul itself; all they can do is to provide a matrix, a

medium, favourable or unfavourable, for the soul to grow up in. And thus the Christianity of one age cannot guarantee the Christianity of the next age. The religion of the family cannot ensure that each or any child in it should be religious. I can inherit my father's property, and his name, even his religious ideas, but I cannot inherit my father's faith. So intensely personal is the religion of Jesus, because it is the religion of the spirit, that it must be renewed in each generation as though it were the primitive age of Christianity. Every soul must be born anew, not in virtue of its parentage, but of its own inherent needs. You cannot, I say, transmit your faith to your children as you do your constitution. We often talk, I think, as though this were possible, but that is not so. No ; each child of your love must become a Christian, if at all, in his own right. You can give him the benefit of your example, your instruction, your training, your influence, but his faith, his religious convictions, he must find for himself ; these must come to him from the Father of lights, and he must accept them for himself. No one can do so for him.

This fact throws a flood of light on the slow progress of the Christian religion in the world. For it means that Christianity has to begin again in every age ; it has a new world to conquer with each generation of little children. We do not see this very easily, because the generations overlap in so intricate and gradual a way ; yet it is literally and absolutely true. If every individual soul must be born again before it can become a true Christian, does it not follow that Christianity has to begin over again with every soul ?

And if it is true that Christian institutions, and various channels of Christian influence, and the out-

ward machineries of religion, can and do continue from age to age, is it not also true that evil institutions and influences also continue? Is not evil, like the poor, continually with us; and does it not tend to entrench itself in the heart of society, so that it is ever ready to contest with goodness for its place in the world? Nay, is it not in some mysterious manner born with us and in us, a part of the warp and woof of our very self? And therefore in the inner kingdom of every fresh soul the elemental battle has to be waged over again, the battle of light and darkness, of good and evil, as though that soul were the only one on earth. You and I had to fight this battle, and some here are fighting it now, as though you and I were an epitome of the race to which we belong, and the great war of Armageddon had to be settled in the silent inner world of our own individual souls. It boots not that our parents and forebears had to go through the same struggle and had to conquer; their victory is not our victory; ours must be our own, as theirs was their own. Truly from generation to generation "there is no release in this warfare;" it is perpetually being settled, but it is being perpetually renewed, and it will be renewed age by age so long as new souls are born to struggle, and to conquer, or to die the second death.

4. Such, then, are the laws and conditions of the spiritual life. What—to come to my application—are the conclusions to which they point?

(1) These thoughts should be no source of discouragement to us; it should never be a discouragement to face the truth. It is always well to understand the conditions under which we have to work. And these are the conditions: First, that re-

ligion belongs to the kingdom of freedom, of free choice, of voluntary action; secondly, that it can only succeed according as each age, and each individual in every age, responds to its appeal and tests its promises; and that, thirdly, the responsibility of rejecting the Gospel rests with those who do so reject it. We can thus understand why the great faith we profess is so slow to extend its empire in the world. It makes great demands on the soul, it calls for a great surrender; and it can bless us only as we meet these demands with hearty acceptance and complete obedience. And being the creatures we are, it is no wonder that there are ebb as well as flood-tides in the progress of religion from age to age in this neighbourhood, and that so many reject wilfully what they should gladly accept. This is what must inevitably follow in a world like this. For the great enemy of the Gospel—the sin that doth so easily beset us—is ever here, perpetually renewing its grasp, and calling up its reserves, and fighting for the mastery.

(2) And what is the duty that lies before us? It is to strengthen the appeal of religion to the men and women who so sorely need it that they may be redeemed. It is to make the religious environment ever more favourable to the birth and growth of faith in the young hearts growing up around us. It is to fight with the evil that destroys men's souls—to fight it with quenchless ardour and a courage perpetually renewed. It is so to manifest the power of the Gospel in our own lives, and so to bring its influence to bear on the community at large, and on individual men and women, that we may be ever laying siege to them and persuading them to accept the Gospel for themselves. Are the conditions in

many directions to-day harder than they have been for a long time? That is in my judgment true. But therein I find a call and a challenge: First, to examine ourselves and see whether we "adorn the doctrine of our God and Saviour" in our own lives, or are hindering it by the feebleness of our faith and the unworthiness of our walk and conversation; and, secondly, to give ourselves with greater consecration to the work of the Gospel in our churches and our homes and in the wider world. What the world wants to-day is more true-hearted, far-reaching, effective religious faith. There are terrible evils to overcome that can be overcome only by religion; there are social conditions that can be reformed only by the awakening of a Christian conscience in the community; there are international and racial troubles that only Christ can deal with. The civilised world has for a long time been trying to overcome the evils in it apart from religion, and the result is that they have been growing worse instead of better. Hence this terrible war. Let us show a more excellent way to the world. Unto us are given the oracles of God, and it is through us, if at all, that they will reach the world. Will the world receive them to-day, or will it refuse them as it once refused the Lord Himself? Whether it will or will not it is not for us to say; ours it is to see that the offer is made, and made perpetually, and made persuasively, in His name.

(3) Finally, let us not forget that in this work and warfare and service we are not alone. This battle is not ours, but the Lord's. Are the odds just now against us? Let not our heart fail us; and if it does, God is greater than our heart. His resources are not exhausted. "He that keepeth Israel shall

neither slumber nor sleep." His heart is set on the salvation of the world, and in the end He will not fail to bring righteousness into judgment. The tide will turn; the day will dawn; there is more light and truth to break forth from God's holy word. Jesus will yet come to His own on earth as well as in heaven. And when the better day comes to its meridian I want to be at my post—don't you?—to share in the ingathering of the sheaves, and join in the shout of harvest home!

VI

THE FAITH TALENT

"I knew thee, that thou art an hard man. . . . Thou oughtest therefore . . . !"—MATT. XXV. 24-7.

THE Unprofitable Servant in this parable has done duty for many pulpit discourses, in which he has received scant mercy; but I am not sure that the true nature of his failure has always been expounded.

It is clear that what was wrong with this man was not so much his sloth as the cause of that sloth in the bitterness and rebelliousness of his spirit. His attitude towards his master was such that he could not possibly serve him in any true sense. Like most weak men, he probably had a good conceit of himself, and a keen sense of his rights. In his heart he believed that his abilities were equal to those of his fellows. The master was ostensibly distributing the talents to each "according to his ability." Yet he gave one of the others five times as much as to him, and to another twice. Having such an opinion of himself, he revolted against what must have seemed to him an act of sore injustice. "He is an hard man," said he to himself in his bitterness of heart; and so he went and hid his talent in the earth. And in so doing he stands for that large class of people who are disappointed with their lot in life; who, when they compare their deserts and their opportunities, find the balance against them, and who in disgust at the

unequal ways of Providence refuse to use the chances they have, and comfort themselves with saying hard things about God and man by way of self-justification.

But the vital point in this section of the parable is the answer given to this man by his master. It is significant that, though he knew himself to be misjudged, he makes no attempt to justify himself. On the other hand, he accepts the Unprofitable Servant's estimate of himself on its merits, not because it was true, but that he might meet this man on his ground, and show how wrong was his attitude. "Thou knewest," he says with lofty irony—"thou knewest that I was an hard man?" . . . "Thou oughtest, therefore"—if this were true—"to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury." This, I say, is the startling part of this proverb, and it is to this that I invite your particular attention.

I

We have all to face life as it is—a tangle of changes and chances that are different for all of us; and we all come to some estimate, favourable or otherwise of its total value. Being the creatures we are, it is not easy to equate our sense of what is due to us with things as they are. To most of us life does not present itself, any more than it did to this man, as a just system. It is full of inequalities—inequalities of gift, and constitution, and temperament; inequalities of chances and opportunities; inequalities of health, and circumstances, and experience. It is thus not easy for the majority of men to accept their place and lot with satisfaction.

Life is hard for most of us at the best, and it is apparently much harder for some than for others. And it makes the case harder for most of us that we tend to compare our lot, not with that of those who are less fortunate than ourselves, but of those who are more fortunate. We do not see why so many people should be so much better placed than we are, should be abler in brain, have better health or more money, or be happier in their surroundings, their business, their family circumstances. Have we not an equal or better power of enjoying life's good things than those who have them? Could we not, and would we not, make more of our neighbour's chances, if we had them, than they do? Why were we not born in the purple of kings, or the easy circumstances of the rich and fortunate? And why, though we try ever so hard, does success, which comes so easily to others, ever elude and fly away from us? These are the questions we ask of Providence. And because we cannot see our way through this tangle, we are prone to fall into the sourness and bitterness of attitude so well typified in this Unprofitable Servant. Since we have not what we desire nor what we think we deserve, we come to the conclusion that the world is built on a hard, unjust, unyielding foundation. And the issue is that, instead of making the best of life as it is, we end by making nothing of it, and we justify our attitude by railing against God for His unequal treatment of His children. And even when we do not go so far as this, but do our duty in a subdued and nerveless way, there is no joy and no enterprise in it, no eager attack on the unfavourable conditions of life with a view to make the best of them. "And he went and hid his talent in the earth. . . . Lo,

thou hast thine own." And, at last, we return to God our poor talent, rusty and dusty and unimproved, and say to Him, "Lo! Thou hast Thine own." This, I am afraid, is all that many men make of their life—and that is, nothing.

Now there are two possible ways of attempting to meet this situation. The first is to try to show that there is more justice in the disposition of life's ordinances and chances than we imagine. Our tendency, as I have said, is to exaggerate the inequalities and unjust aspects of human lot, especially in our own case. I will not profess to believe with Emerson that behind all appearances there is something in the differences between man and man that cancels them all out at last : that the beggar and the millionaire are really equal if we could see things in the dry light of reason. None the less, we may hold that pessimistic views of life are not only onesided, but untrue ; that life at its worst is worth having, and that the differences between one man and another are nothing like so great as they appear.

There is, however, another and better way of meeting our difficulty : it is to accept these differences as real, at least for the sake of the argument, as does the master in the parable, and to make the very difficulties and inequalities of life a ground for high and strenuous and hopeful effort. It is to accept the challenge of life's inequalities with a cheery courage ; to face its apparent injustices with an unconquerable faith ; to take the worst it contains as a reason, not for shirking our allotted part, but that we may make the best of it. "Thou knewest that I was an hard man ? Thou oughtest therefore . . . !"

II

I am preaching this sermon because there is much in the prevalent mood of the world which is disturbing to the thoughtful mind as it looks out on the Universe, and tries to realise man's place and fate in it. The old naïve faith of former ages in the essential goodness of the Divine government has passed under what seems an obstinate eclipse. Life, which to our pious forefathers was a vision, has to-day for most of us become a problem, or rather, a series of problems. There is the problem of existence itself; there are the problems of suffering, of limitation, of moral evil, of social contrasts, of individual tragedy and failure. And these all lead to the problem of God Himself. What kind of Being is He who has made such a world? And why, having made it, does He not manifestly control it to good ends? Why does He seem so silent in His heaven amid the injustices, errors, and miseries of this sinful world? We look beneath us, and we see Nature "red in tooth and claw," and face the terrible law of the survival of the fit triumphing over the weak and ailing with something like horror. We look around us, and we see man's inhumanity to man, and war, social tyranny, and class-hatred reigning still among a race that is, at least, ostensibly reasonable. We look up, and we see vast silent spaces, dark and illimitable, from which no voice sounds and no hand is stretched forth to bring forth righteousness into judgment. In earlier ages these facts were explained on the ground that this is a sinful world, and that it will some day be put right by an almighty and righteous hand. But that answer no longer seems to satisfy. The modern mood is not to indict man, but God;

in view of these threats, culprit and judge have for the time changed places. "I know Thee that Thou art an hard God" is the muttered complaint or the implicit feeling of not a few troubled souls. And even those of us who hold to a brighter creed are more or less affected by the general disquietude that is in the air. There is a widespread loss of the brightness and joy in God that characterised the religion of earlier times; and the light of the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ, with His revelation of the Divine Fatherhood, has faded for many into the distance, with all the loss of initiative and enterprise which naturally follows from such an attitude.

III

What is our duty in such an era of spiritual discouragement as this? I will take for granted, for the sake of our argument, that the discouragement is at least partially justified, and that faith in the inherent goodness of the Universe is no longer easy. If so, what manner of men should we be? Listen once more:

"His lord said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not. . . . Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury."

That is to say, no sad and sinister interpretation of life that may seem to be forced on us can release us from the sublime inspiration of duty, from the inner call to make the most of things as they are, from the demand of life to throw our whole weight and enterprise on the side of good and of God. This is the ringing cry that comes to me from these

words of the Master to His nerveless and faithless servant. Whatever light may fade from our sky, the solid earth is beneath our feet, life's organic, unavoidable relationships are around us, and be it dark or bright in our soul's inner shrine, life has to be lived, and things have to be done, and we are here to do them the best we may. Even if all we can do is to fear God, we must "do His commandments."

This is the true life of faith. For faith is the soul's venture on the side of what is right, and fair, and noble, in a world which is full of problems, and difficulties, and sorrows, and failures, where night follows day, and the blackness of darkness so often falls on the pilgrim path of humanity. And this is what justifies faith—that those who follow her lamp's shining do, at least, add something to the general sum of such goodness as is here, whether there be goodness at the heart of things or not. We are helping things on; we are increasing the value of life for others as well as ourselves; we are making heavy burdens easier for shoulders that are bowed down, and the path smoother for footsteps that are growing tired and slow, and for hearts that are ready to faint by the way. It means that, so far as we are concerned, we are making life more worth while for everybody else in the world. For no one can deny that patience and courage and spiritual enterprise are an addition to the working forces of goodness in any world, and supremely so in the world that now is, with its many high opportunities amid all discouragements, and checks, and tragedies. And if behind the cloudy darkness that so often besets us there be a good God, who is all the while working through us and expecting us to do our part as co-workers with Him, then is it a thousandfold more worth while

being true, and brave, and trustful, and loyal to the highest voices of life, so increasing our talent of gift, and our pound of opportunity for His "well-done" at the last !

IV

And when we go deeper still into our subject, is it not clear that such progress as the world shows is due to the exercise of this "faith-talent" in all the walks and ways of life ?

Think, for instance, of the way in which our race has fought its way upward from those far beginnings of time when man first began his chequered career on this planet. Primitive man was surrounded by conditions of life so hard and inhospitable that we can scarcely conceive of his difficulties. The environment in which we live, hard as it sometimes appears to us, is an Elysium compared with his. He was exposed almost defenceless to extremes of cold and heat, surrounded by monstrous creatures, whose gigantic skeletons now grace our museums, but which were then a living nightmare of terror to him ; devoid of the conveniences of civilised life, of weapons, of tools, of comforts, which he had painfully to acquire under the stern pressure of necessity and in the face of imminent dangers—such were the conditions of his daily life. When we feel inclined to despise our prehistoric ancestors, let us think of these things, and let us pause to admire the quenchless, resourceful spirit, the abundant "faith-talent" which enabled our race to make the transition from the savage or of that far-off chapter of human history to the astonishing and ever-progressive sovereignty of present-day science and art and civilisation over the rude and crude conditions under which man

began his earthly career. Truly it is the victory of his faith which has removed these mountains.

Again, all progress in philosophy through the long ages is entirely due to the same "faith-talent"—the faith, *i.e.*, of great solitary thinkers, that behind all the error and mystery and perplexity of the mind Truth somewhere shines, and who (just because Truth has been so coy and difficult of access) have refused to let her go till she has blessed them.

Once more. All progress in religion has been due to the faith of noble men and women who have clung, in spite of all appearances, to the belief that behind the most dreadful ills of the world there is a principle of goodness somewhere with which they desire to link themselves, and which will reward them with its clear shining and its well-done at last.

In all these directions, as well as in the world of affairs, the world has been moving slowly upwards through dim twilights of sorrow and struggle, in virtue of the "faith-talent" of noble souls, and their stubborn loyalty, in spite of all appearances, to the Divine impulse that has carried them on. Truly the creation has been groaning and travailing, waiting for the appearing of those sons of God who have carried this banner of heroic enterprise. History tells us that there is no upward progress except along this rugged path, and it tells us also that the way, if slow, is sure, and that those who walk along it are the only truly great and good. The hardness of life can be conquered only by the faith that refuses to acknowledge defeat, and insists on transforming the difficulties of the way into stepping-stones of progress.

I put it to you: If this is true, is it not worth our while to join the company of those who in the face of the worst believe in the best; who indeed accept

life at its worst, and wring the best out of it by sheer obstinacy of faith? Is it not worth while, in spite of the worst that life contains for us, to throw our whole personal forces on the side of those who increase the moral values of life by the spirit in which they carry on their work for God and man, who lift high the lofty ideals of life, its happy hopes, its soaring possibilities of good? We cannot do much, possibly, to shed light into the darkness, or to roll away the stones from the sepulchres of life's disappointments, but we can bear our witness and do our part; we can be "on the side of the angels"; we can take up our cross, and follow Him who conquered sin and death and hell by the same "faith-talent" as He has given to us, sure that if we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him.

IV

I have in this sermon taken up the ground of the pessimist, and based my appeal on that interpretation of the mystery of life which is the worst rather than the best, on the ground that even so the only life worth living is the life of faith. I cannot, however, and be true to my deepest convictions, close on that note; for I do not share the pessimist's creed. Rather do I believe, not the worst, but the best of the world. It is not the wreck of a cosmos, but a cosmos in the making; it is not a ruined palace, but a great cathedral, which is being slowly built up by the cosmic architect, out of the tragedies and blunders of human life, through and by the help of His faithful servants. The materials are rough and rude; the instruments of its fashioning are the furnace of sorrow, the chisel of pain, the hammer of

affliction, the fine file of patience and long endurance. Truly our chastening is not joyous, but grievous while it lasts. But the issue is safe, and it is beautiful. Just as the ice-age, the glacier, the volcano and the earthquake were needful to prepare the way for every glamorous vision of sunrise on Alpine heights, so have the convulsions and tragedies of history and the long agony of the race been needful for the vision of the City of God, the Holy Jerusalem of the perfected humanity, which is slowly descending out of Heaven from God. Just now we are in the quarry, and the forest, and the mine, and the furnace, being moulded for our place in the temple of God. But if we give ourselves to His will, we shall not fail to find a place in His eternal purpose.

This Unprofitable Servant failed because he misjudged his master and shirked his duty, and so he missed his way and lost his reward. But there were two other servants who did not fail him ; nor did he fail them at the last. And the teaching of Jesus in this parable is that the Universe and its Maker are on the side not of the shirker but the worker, not with the cynic but the man of faith, not the self-seeker but the earnest server of his kind. May we all be among those who, whether they have great talents or small, multiply them as they go, and who, when the reckoning comes, can prove they have been faithful in the little, and so shall be found worthy to be entrusted with the rulership of the many.

VII

THE THREEFOLD GOSPEL

(A Sermon to Students, Preached in Mansfield College Chapel, Oxford)

"THE" Gospel.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."—Rom. i. 16.

"OUR" Gospel.

"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake."
1 Thess. i. 5.

"MY" Gospel.

"In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel."—Rom. xi. 16.

I wish to speak here of the threefold Gospel of Jesus Christ (or rather, of the threefold aspect of that one Gospel) suggested in the Pauline passages chosen for my text. In the first phrase—"The Gospel"—we have its objective aspect, what it is in itself, in virtue of its inner contents and self-evidencing truth and power. In the second phrase—"Our Gospel"—we have its social or communal aspect, as realised in the fellowship of believing souls. In the third phrase—"My Gospel"—we have the personal, experimental aspect of it, as held in the faith of the individual Christian. As objective, it is fact, and truth, and power, ready to be assimilated, believed, and practised, but as yet unrealised and disembodied.

As social, the fact is believed, the faith realised, the power exhibited in the common life of the Church. As personal, the objective fact and truth, held by the Church in trust, is experienced and manifested in the life of the individual. These three are one, yet are they three ; and if we consider them in their mutual relations, we shall find each illuminated in the light of the others. You cannot have a full presentation of the Christian Gospel unless you view it in these three historic manifestations.

I

The Objective Gospel. — What do we mean by this? We mean by it "the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God," which implies that Christianity as a religion is founded on, or rather rooted in, certain facts and events in history. It is not an abstract philosophy, it is not an ethical code, it is not a vision of truth ; it is a religion which, while fruitful of much philosophic speculation, and of very definite ethical results, and of rich doctrinal developments, consists in the last resort in a historical revelation centred in a definite personality of transcendent beauty and power, and consummated in and through certain events in His life, death, and resurrection. The Christian Gospel is indissolubly associated with the Person of Jesus Christ as its vehicle and embodiment, and apart from Him there is nothing distinctive and authoritative about it.

We are familiar here with the attempt that has recently been made to divorce Christianity from history, and to exhibit it as a theory of life or a programme of conduct which is in no way invalidated by the surrender of the supposed historical positions with which it has hitherto been associated. All the ingenuities of scholarship have been exhausted in

endeavouring to show that the lovely idyll of the Gospels is but the fruit of a brooding imagination working on a fictitious picture of the past. The historic Jesus, if He ever existed at all, simply served for the function fulfilled by the nucleus of a crystal—the point round which the forces that make it gather and deposit their material ; and, as chemists tell us, the nucleus of a crystal, as often as not, is a vacuum, or at best a cavity. The religious environment when Christianity arose was charged with certain vital religious ideas and impulses. Men were universally filled with a passion for spiritual redemption ; they dwelt longingly and lovingly on the old-world myths in which this longing had been successively enshrined; and round the figure of an obscure but attractive Jewish peasant, who had a certain vogue in his day as a teacher, these myths were deposited in a rich compost of ideas and doctrines first formulated and disseminated by the Apostle Paul, who was the really creative source of historic Christianity as a creed and a power. This extraordinary theory would not be worth considering were it not that it has a certain momentary vogue, as any new and sufficiently confident religious theory may have in these days of religious unsettlement. In Germany, the land of its birth, it is already dead and almost forgotten, slain by the final attacks of all reputable students of history; but here it still has a few adherents who are active in its advocacy in a weak and imitative way. The trouble is not in any fear that such a notion will prevail, but that it serves to spread the impression that Christianity is not really so dependent on history as has been imagined, thus unsettling the faith of many who have no time or competency to go exhaustively into the subject.

It is the function of the classroom and the study

to deal with the question of evidence; here I will only emphasise the undoubted fact that Christianity as we know it is the fruit of a deep and happy faith in a revelation that was historic or nothing. It is significant that the earliest creeds contain no theory of life, no code of morals, but a brief, pregnant confession of belief in the facts through which the Christian Gospel poured its healing stream into the world; and in thus emphasising the historic element they show a sound instinct, for it is the facts of the Gospel as such which are the fountain heads of the ethics of the Gospel, the taproot of its doctrinal developments, and the centre of its practical power. In a word, it is the coming of Jesus that made the rise of Christianity possible; it is faith in Him as the Incarnate Son of God, who lived a true human life, died a sacrificial death on the Cross, and rose from the dead on the third day, which first gave rise to the Christian Church; and it is the same faith, with all its implications—the redeeming Fatherly love of God in Jesus Christ, and the sufficiency of that love and grace to save men from sin and death—which can alone renew the life of the individual believer and of the community. The interpretation of these facts has differed in the successive ages and stages of faith, and they will continue to change as time goes on and men's thoughts widen with the process of the suns; but without the facts there can be no interpretation of them. We shall have many schools of theology in the future as in the past, but only one religion, one faith—the "faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us"; "who lived and was dead, and is alive for evermore." From the beginning to the end of my active ministry I have preached this Gospel of Redemption by Incarnation and Sacrifice, and if I had the privilege granted me of beginning my ministry

over again, I would continue to preach it with a deeper conviction, a surer faith, a more heartfelt joy than ever. The objective Christian Gospel, rooted and grounded in the Person of Jesus, is the basis of every valid form of Christian faith.

II

We pass, then, from the objective aspect of the Gospel to its social aspect—from fact, that is, to faith. Logically, perhaps, I ought to begin with the faith of the individual rather than the faith of the community; but though the Church is composed of individual believers, none the less is the faith of believers rooted in and appropriated through the faith of the Church. The first original company which was the germ of the Church was composed, it is true, of individual believers, but from that day to this the converse has been true—the Church is the antecedent fact; the communal faith, *i.e.*, has been the matrix or medium in and by which all individual faith has been quickened and fed.

So I pass on next to the Church rather than to the individual—the Church, *i.e.*, as the social embodiment of the Gospel. The fact of Christ unquestionably created the faith in Christ. "The" Gospel, thus becomes "our" Gospel. This implies two things: that the objective Gospel has power to create a living faith in it, and that this faith has taken historic form in the Christian community or Church. And how potent and persistent has been this power! For two thousand years the story of Jesus has awakened, and sustained, and renewed a certain form of spiritual life among men. The Spirit of Jesus, in other words, has been at work in the world. Wherever two or three of His people have

been gathered together, there He has been, no longer as a splendid but isolated figure in history, but in their very midst as a living Presence and Power. Were it not for this extraordinary projection of Himself along the channel of history, the story of Jesus would long since have been forgotten; but while it continues men will turn back to the records of His earthly life and ministry, death and resurrection, with a passionate interest and an unfading faith. What is it that always keeps men so busy with the origins of our faith? Is it not its historic fruits? Is it hard to believe the story of the Gospels, in these days of a rigid critical temper and of pitiless historic methods? Then, I ask, why is it harder for some of us to disbelieve in it? Because of the existence and vitality of the Church which continues that story and of certain facts that lie behind it. Why do I continue to believe in the historic resurrection and in the wonderful deeds, and still more wonderful personality, of Him who died and rose again, "according to the Scriptures"? Not solely nor perhaps chiefly because of the documentary evidence, but because of the regenerated lives of the men and women who through faith in Him have become new creatures, and for whom He hath made all things new; nay, because His risen life has become my own life and my own joy, so that "the life I now live in the flesh I live in faith, and the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." That life I share with others; it is not a merely individual streamlet, but a wide, deep river flowing through the ages, sweeping with ever broadening current through the valleys of the world, always and everywhere carrying with it the same blessings, and everywhere blossoming along its banks into the same fruitfulness;

"for on this side of the river and on that is the tree of life, yielding its fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."

Now this communal faith has been a mighty power over thought as well as faith. It has quickened theologically into the historic systems of thought; it has blossomed practically into various types of Christian character; it has germinated periodically into political and social reformations; it has awakened men into speculative activity in philosophy, into artistic fruitfulness in painting, music and architecture, into literary creativeness in poetry and drama, into a fuller and fresher life in a thousand directions. Take away the stimulating influence of the communal faith of Christendom, and what would history have been? We do not know; but we do know that the ages of faith have been the ages of accelerated progress and most rapid advance in every fruitful direction; and that when the lights of faith in the Church have become dim, the higher life of men in the world has grown faint, and fallen stagnant. Every great revival in religion has issued in a renewal of all that makes men great and progressive in every social direction. The race has been at its best when faith in Christ has been at its brightest, when the Church has been at its purest. When "the" faith becomes "our" faith in the universal sense, then will the Kingdom of God come to birth, and earth be "crammed with heaven."

III

But Paul speaks not only of the Gospel and of our Gospel but of "my Gospel." The communal faith was significant to him because he possessed it as his very own.

Our faith, too, must be a personal faith, or it will not finally avail for us. I was born unto the common faith; it was around me like a stimulating breath, a light, a glory that shone on me from without in the lives of others; but till it sank into my own heart and quickened in the recesses of my own spirit, it did not begin its perfect work. So Paul, writing to a Church which held the faith as a social fact, spoke of its members with solicitous and yearning desire: "My little children, of whom I am in travail, till Christ be born in you." This is the end and aim of both the objective Gospel of fact and the communal Gospel of faith—that it should germinate in individual men into the personal gospel of conviction. It is good to think of that gracious and compelling fact of Jesus Christ lying far back in the ages—the blossoming point of history. It is better to think of that faith once delivered to the saints—the deposit of truth and of power—that sacred incarnation of the Grace of God in the great and good which has been so potent through the ages, and which is so potent in society to-day. But all this is little or nothing to us unless we surrender our lives to its keeping, and find it quickening in us like a springtime of faith and hope and love. *The* faith, *our* faith, must become *my* faith, ere I can know it at its best. The first and last word of the Gospel is to the individual. A great writer speaks of Jesus as having first awakened that fine sentiment which he calls the enthusiasm of humanity. This, if I may say so, is a very partial and inadequate way of indicating a great fact. Jesus had no love, apparently, for man in the abstract or in his totality. He loved men in the concrete. The State is the political unit; the family is the social unit; but the religious unit

is the soul. And it was to souls that He preached; it was to souls that He laid siege with His loving influence and appeal; it was souls He died to save. Therefore, the aim of all spiritual activity is the conversion of individual men and women to the faith of the Gospel. The true Church is composed of believers, and all true believers are men who believe on their own account. Only as the Church grows by the addition to its numbers of such believers can it really and truly grow at all.

We cannot live on the faith of others. A life so lived is spiritually parasitic; it is a borrowed life, having no initiative and no propagative power of its own. Faith, indeed, in the last resort is not faith at all till it becomes a personal faith. Alone we came into the world, alone in the deepest sense we pass through it, alone we must pass out of it. What, indeed, avails it for us that we live among people who are believers, Christians, saints, if we do not ourselves believe? Their faith can bless us in a thousand ways, but it cannot save us; in the end it can but mock us with a sense of its own fulness and of our emptiness.

But when this personal faith awakes in men, what a moment in their life is that! Sometimes like the snapping of a chain, like the breaking open of a prison door, and lo! all things are become new. Sometimes like the slow recovery from a fever, like the dawning of the morning after a night of fear and nightmare. But always it issues in a "new creation," turning chaos into order, and barrenness into beauty. It is nothing less than a passing from death into life, from the bondage of sin and Satan into the "liberty of the children of God."

It was the realisation of such a change as this within

him that enabled Paul to preach the Gospel as he did—with a sense of ineffable release, of unfailing confidence and joy. This was what made him a true preacher of the Gospel, and this alone can make preachers to-day. There was a sense in which Paul had been set apart for the Gospel from his mother's womb—his great powers and his many-sided training all moved to this consummation; but not till his soul was lit up by "the faith of the Son of God" did the moment come when his life was fired into a conscious passion for the souls of men. Then all became incandescent within him, and he laid his vast gifts, his burning love, his resistless will on the altar of the Redeemer, and bid them blaze there and burn out for His glory.

This personal faith, brother preachers, is the basis of your charter and call to the ministry. That ministry will be valuable in precise proportion to the intensity and depth of your faith, and to your capacity to communicate it to others. This will be the measure of your efficiency as distinguished from your popularity. Till you can take the faith and transmit it through the Church and its pulpit to the individual as your faith, you are not preaching the Gospel; but when you do, and in the measure in which you can, you will have the Apostolic note, and through you the Apostolic grace will be manifested, and the Apostolic succession will be continued.

It is one of the happy features of the Christian faith that it lends itself to individual statement with an infinite resourcefulness. And while the true preacher is faithful to the essentials of the Gospel which is common to him and all other believers, he must impart to it the tone and colour of his own personal life in its presentation, so that while thus

faithful to the communal faith, its particular form is his own and not another's, and bears the inalienable stamp of his individual experience. Just as the life-principle in nature embodies itself here in the fin that cleaves the water, there in the wing that mounts the air, yonder in the flower that adorns the meadow, and again in the heart that beats in a man, so various in its manifestations, and yet so identical in its essence is the Gospel in the sermons of great preachers ; they all tell the same message, and yet they use language and forms as diverse as the experiences that enshrine it and the words that express it. It is of the utmost importance for every young preacher to find his own way of putting his message that its attractiveness will be enhanced by the stamp of his own individuality. This he will do not by affecting singularity of manner or novelty of thought, but first by living the Gospel faithfully in his experience, and then by presenting it as earnestly and simply as he can.

Therefore while during these years of your training for the ministry you study many subjects and pass through a complicated technical discipline, it is for you to see that the flame of your personal faith burns with a steady and ever-brightening lustre on the altar of your own inner life. If while you are here that flame burns low or goes out, then all is over for you as a preacher ; but if it grows and strengthens to the end—as it ought and must—then everything you study will add fuel to the flame, and you will go forth joyfully to your life work, and become a burning and a shining light to your day and generation.

VIII

THE BLESSED ART OF PEACEMAKING

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."—MATT. v. 9.

THIS is one of the most characteristic utterances of one who was Himself Prince of Peace: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." So spake the Son of God, who is our peace—that is, our Peacemaker. And therefore, if we would understand a saying of which He was the perfect embodiment, we must study Him.

Some of the Beatitudes are difficult to accept, not because it is possible to doubt their ideal truth, but because it is so hard to apply them in practice in a world like this. And this is one of them. We all recognise the value of peaceful relations, we all reverence the man who can bring them about; but in any particular circumstances, as at the present time, how are these relations to be established? There is just now nothing so universally desired by all the world "as peace on earth, goodwill among men," or, at least, "peace among men of goodwill." And yet, is there a more perplexing problem before the world just now than how to re-establish peace on earth?

Who is the peacemaker—the warrior, the pacifist, the politician, or the diplomatist? Let us consider the different types of possible peacemakers, and try

to apply the Christian test—*i.e.*, the Christ-test—to them in turn.

I

There are, I take it, four types of peacemakers who stand in an ascending scale of harmony with the mind of Christ.

The first type of peacemaker is the successful warrior.

It is the very object of war to win some kind of peace. Every conqueror who does his work thoroughly is in intention a peacemaker. Conquest is only a short way of expressing "peace by compulsion." The stronger side imposes its will on the weaker. The vanquished people accept the terms of the victors because their power of resistance is gone; it is peace or perishing, acceptance or annihilation—"Hobson's choice," in which there is only one alternative. That is the peace imposed on Britain when conquered 1,800 years ago by Rome, and that is the peace imposed on every conquered nation before and since when beaten to its knees by superior force. That is the peace which has for the time been imposed on Belgium, Serbia, Rumania, Montenegro, in this war. It is the peace of unconditional surrender. It is the German peace, which the Kaiser is wishful, if he can, to impose on all the nations now at war with him. The "will to power" seeks peace by overcoming all opposition to that will.

So far we are not even in sight of any moral, much less any Christian, principle. Might irrespective of right is the law of the tiger, whether that be the tiger in the jungle or a tiger on the throne. Time was when there was no other principle at work in the relations of peoples. The stronger in the long run

never failed to subdue and coerce the weaker, and it continued in power only till it was in turn overcome by a nation still stronger than itself. That was how the great ancient empires—Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Babylon, Rome—arose ; that was how at last they fell. You can see this oscillation of the centre of power moving about in the ancient world life, like the swinging of a great tide from point to point, carrying empire in front of it, leaving desolation and slavery behind it.

But, let us confess it, even this kind of peace-making—the peace that comes from sheer conquest—has not always been a hopeless matter. Only when it has taken the form of extermination or universal slavery has it been an unmixed evil. There have been empires, in ancient as well as modern times, which have exercised their power of conquest more or less beneficently and for the benefit of the conquered. The Roman Empire stood no opposition to its conquering will, but once peace was established on a firm footing it left the conquered nation very much to itself, so long as it paid its tribute (never very exacting), and recognised the Emperor's authority. And in return Rome lent her culture freely to all the nations under her sway. In most cases we may say that those nations were far better off, under the conditions of the times, as vassals to Rome than they would have been if independent. For if Rome imposed her own peace on the nations conquered by her, she kept the peace between them and each other, and gave them something like security and a chance to develop on civilised lines.

Let us confess also that we as an Empire have often imposed such a peace on weaker nations. We, too, have built up our Empire by wars of aggression. There is not an inch of foreign soil administered by

us which was not taken more or less by force from someone who had a prior claim to it. When in America last year this fact was often thrown at me by sympathisers with Germany. I could not deny its truth; but I was able to point out the equally undoubted fact that there is not a square mile of United States territory of which this same is not also true. Every civilised nation to-day is occupying land which was taken at one time or another by a conquering army or tribe from a conquered army or tribe. And this on the whole has told for good. Speaking historically, war has been one of the civilising agencies of the world, and has been used by Providence for the advancement of backward peoples. Those who do not believe this are faced with a world which is a standing object-lesson of its truth. It has been one of the stages upward in the progress of humanity.

I will go one step farther and recognise that Germany in the present war is, in intention, wishful to impose a German peace which she conceives would be for the good of the whole world. She believes that the only salvation of modern society is that it should be thoroughly Germanised, and as that can only be secured by force, she is using force to do so. The case, however, is different from these others in one essential point. It is one thing to take possession of territory from a barbarous tribe in the interests of civilisation, and therefore, ultimately, of that tribe itself; it is another, at a higher grade of culture, to suppress the peaceful national instincts of a civilised race, capable of self-government and passionately devoted to its liberties. In modern Europe, where each nation is capable of following out its own destiny and of fulfilling its own function

in the comity of peoples, it is an intolerable sin against all that is great and promising in the social progress of humanity for one great nation suddenly to undertake to standardise the whole world to its own pattern, and use the rest as a pedestal for its own greatness. And it is because we as a nation stand for another and higher type of civilisation, which admits the right of all nations to contribute in their own free and unhampered way to the common march of good, that we have a right to refuse a peace which would throw the whole world back to the days, not of Rome, but of Assyria and Babylon and the prehistoric night. We must, therefore, reject the peacemaker who is the mere exponent of the will to power.

II

The second type of peacemaker is the man who would make peace on any terms rather than go to war or carry on a war already begun to a victorious conclusion.

Here we have the true pacifist, who stands on the principle that the exercise of force is essentially wrong in the establishment of a good cause. I cannot stop to argue this case just now, but simply to point out the only principle by applying which this position can be successfully met. That is, that the use of force is neither right nor wrong in itself, but becomes right or wrong according to the cause with which it is identified and the end to which it is put. The true relation of might and right is really so very simple that it seems almost too trite to state. It is this: It is justifiable to use might in the defence and vindication of right, but not in substitution for it. That is the proper function of force—to be a

weapon in the hand of a righteous will, that the conditions of freedom, justice, and progress may be realised and upheld. That is the place of compulsory discipline in the schoolroom, of the policeman in civil life, of the soldier in national and international relations. Their true function is to be the instrumentalities of the social conscience by which it establishes and safeguards social relations, and so leads them to a higher stage of progress and moral standing.

True, it is only at certain stages and levels of progress that this function of force as the vindication of right is needed. At all higher levels it has no application. In the family, for instance, the children arrive at a stage of growth when physical punishment becomes ridiculous as well as unjust. In school-life, if a lad of seventeen cannot be made to behave himself by moral suasion and without compulsion, the remedy is not a thrashing, but—expulsion. And so on. The point is that there are stages when the arm of force is necessary in order to establish and maintain right relations among men. At these stages it is wrong to play fast and loose with the conditions of well-being. In such a case a weak government may be almost more disastrous than a bad government. Mere good-nature on the throne is a poor sustainer of good order. If force has to be used against the wrong-doer, be it an individual criminal or an aggressive nation, it must be used with firmness, consistency, and completeness.

The pacifist's fallacy is to think that right can vindicate itself without a vindicator, or justice be done without someone to enforce it. Justice, righteousness, goodness—all these beautiful things are pure abstractions till they are embodied in personalities; and by themselves they have no more power in the

affairs of the world than clouds in the sky have over the earth's motion or beautiful dreams over the cause of a disease. Justice, to be anything, means just men ; goodness, good men ; purity, pure men ; love, loving men—*i.e.*, they are qualities, not entities, and derive their reality entirely from the personalities that embody them. If you pray for the millennium and sit idly waiting for it, the millennium will never come. The millennium will only come as we hasten it by our millennial lives. And on our human levels we shall never establish the reign of justice, honour, and good faith among nations unless we are prepared to insist (by force if necessary) that those who make such relations impossible shall behave themselves and fall into line with the rest of the world. That is the justification to-day of the eighteen nations who are at war with Germany, and insist by force that she should keep the peace of the world.

III

Nevertheless, this is not enough. We must therefore rise to that view of peacemaking which will not only hinder those who would break the peace from injuring and wrecking the world, but will never be satisfied till a peace of good-will is established all over the earth. This is the Christian type of peace. It is the kind of peace Christ came to establish, first between man and God, and then between man and man. In the last resource and in the highest sense it is the only genuine peace. Every other kind is simply a preliminary to this ; and unless any other type of peace ends in this kind it is not a real nor will it be a lasting peace. It is only a truce, which may any day blaze up again into a flame of war.

I think we have here the reconciling principle between the militarist and the pacifist. The militarist as such aims only at the physical conquest of the foe; when he has broken his will to resist, he has done all he can. It is not his business to turn the foe into the friend; mere fighting has never done that, any more than mere punishment has ever turned a rogue into an honest man. So we must supplement militarism by pacifism, and pacifism of the right type, if the work of the peacemaker is to be completed.

What are the conditions of our peace with God? First of all, that we should throw down our arms of rebellion against Him; then that we should repent of our misdeeds; then that we should be willing to enter into relations of fellowship and obedience to His holy will. And how is this to be brought about? It has been brought about through Jesus Christ. He has manifested God's good-will to us; has proved it by His word and His work in reconciliation; has offered God's free forgiveness and oblivion of the past if we are only ready and willing to begin again. He has made peace by the blood of His Cross, a peace which, as the Apostle puts it, has made "a new and living way" unto the Father. Of course, this does not insure that all in rebellion against God's will must be automatically turned from foes to friends. They may still persist in their sin, and so long as they do so then there can be no actual reconciliation. What the Atonement ensures is, not that all will come to repentance, but that the way is open to all. No peace till they come; perfect and eternal peace if and when they do.

The peace of Christ's Cross does not ignore sin, it does not condone sin, it does not make terms with sin; on the other hand, it blasts it with eternal

withering shame. The moral miracle of forgiveness is that sin should be sufficiently condemned while at the same time the repentant sinner is reconciled.

Human peacemaking should aim at nothing less than the Divine. While resisting the will of the wrongdoer even unto blood, it will at the same time never be happy till a way of reconciliation is made possible.

What is the Christian duty of this nation to Germany? It is, first of all, to resist her spirit of cruel aggression to the uttermost as the guardians and custodians of the oppressed nations trampled under her cruel feet. It is to reduce her power of mischief to impotence. When we have done that, there must be restitution and compensation to those she has wronged; there must be adequate proof of a repentant spirit. Then there must be free forgiveness and a willingness to begin again. Till then it would be a sinful compromise with wrong, and a condoning of crimes as black as any in the history of humanity, for us to make peace with Germany. The moral interests of the whole future of humanity would be betrayed and imperilled if we make peace with an unrepentant foe. What are we fighting for, unless it is the vindication of the principle of international righteousness? And how can that be secured till the might that outraged that righteousness is broken, or at least totally discredited?

Meanwhile we are being urged by a distinguished writer—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—to harden our temper and cultivate the spirit of hate as the only true weapon of victory against Germany. Others have also recently advocated the policy of hate in the form of reprisals—*i.e.*, cruelty for cruelty, outrage for outrage, shameful deed for shameful deed, an "eye for an

eye, a tooth for a tooth." Against such a degradation of our national temper and our historic habits of warfare, let us protest with indignation. Have we not gained the respect of the whole world so far by the self-contained and chivalrous way in which we have conducted this war? Have we not congratulated ourselves on our immunity from outrages on land and sea, all ill-treatment of prisoners, and such barbarities? And are we now going to lower our flag, and—at long last—accept the Prussian temper as the only way by which successful war can be waged? If we once do this we shall lose all moral claim to win the war at all. And if, as the Bishop of Winchester well said in reply to this extraordinary lapse into the cult of hate as the way to a thorough and lasting peace—"if it indeed be true that the moral forces are in the end in God's world the forces that win, and if we are out against the embodied lie that might can dispense with right, then the harm that will come in the end from inoculating our souls with the hateful poison of hate will even for the purpose of the war bring us weakness rather than strength, while it must infect our body politic for its future course and for struggles on behalf of liberty and of justice (in which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle would, I surely hope, be out for the right) with the weakness of a terrible disease."

Hate is no Christian sentiment; it is a devil's weapon. We have a right to be angry at wrongdoing, but that we can feel and show without a trace of the poisonous bitterness, the distorting madness, the blind fury that we call "hate." A Christian soldier can do his duty without a trace of hatred in his soul. He who cannot is no Christian.

Nay, war to the death against wrongdoing; peace

without end with wrongdoers, as soon as they have "brought forth fruits meet for repentance." This is the Christian programme for a clean and secure peace. When we can win such a peace for ourselves and all the world, the world will have reason to call us "blessed," and we shall be true children of our heavenly Father, who is the "God of Peace," and is "kind even to the thankless and the evil."

There is one feature of the recent capture of Jerusalem which contains a message for all Christian people. By the common consent of all the belligerents the Holy City passed into the hands of the British forces without a shot being fired from or into its sacred enclosures. It is good to think that in the very heart of this inhuman conflict one hallowed spot has been kept inviolate from the passions and cruelties of war. We know why this wonderful thing occurred. No one wanted to desecrate the scenes where the blessed feet of Jesus had trodden, and where His great Cross was planted. So far, at least, the influence of His peace, the authority of His grace, prevailed over the brutal forces of hatred let loose in this war.

Let this be a parable for us of higher things. At this critical time it is for us to inquire how far the innermost shrine of our religion is still intact from the passions of the hour. Are we still waging this war purely in the interests of those ideals for the vindication of which we entered it four years ago? Is there a secret place within us into which we can escape from the noise of battle, from the bitterness of its hatreds, from the tyranny of its burning passions, and realise that there are principles of morality more sacred than victory, more fundamental than triumph over one's enemies—nay, by the vindication of which

alone we can conquer the hatred and "slay the enmity" which now rages so fiercely against us? Even while we gather up our resources for the settlement of the final issue, is there that in us which already whispers of a peace, not of revenge, but of righteousness, whose final end is the reconciliation, not the destruction, of the foe?

Personally, I believe that the only safe and sure road to such a peace and such a reconciliation is, in the first instance, the conquest, or at least the military as well as moral discrediting of the demoniacal Prussian system which is responsible for the war. "Jerusalem must change hands." But with what object? And for what end? Unless the spirit of peace prevails even in the conduct of the war, which alone can give our efforts moral meaning, it were better for those who take part in it that they had never been born. Not the rape of Belgium, but the conquest of Jerusalem, gives us the clue to the principles of an abiding and unembittered peace. We must conquer in the spirit of Jesus even when wielding the sword.

IX

THE RELIGIOUS MESSAGE OF MUSIC

(Preached at the Dedication of an Organ)

"And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping on their harps: and they sang as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth."

Rev. xiv. 2, 3.

"The sole end and aim of all music should be nothing else than God's glory and the refreshment of the spirit; whereof, if one take not heed, there can be no true music, but only din and discord."—J. S. Bach.

It is a privilege to take part in a service of this kind, in which we dedicate to its rightful uses the noblest instrument of music invented by the ingenuity of man for the highest of ends, that he may glorify God, and lift his own soul into the mood of worshipful obedience to the Divine will. The organ is *par excellence* the instrument of religious music, and it is meet that we should have it to help our worship in our churches, for it is not so much an instrument, as an epitome of all instruments, combining within its ample repertoire the sweetness of a flute, the richness of a harp, the stirring peal of a trumpet, the tenderness of a mother's lullaby. It can breathe its melody into our ears like a whisper, or thunder it at us like a storm at sea; it can mourn and laugh; it can

cajole, suggest, and overwhelm us in turn; now sighing like the wind among aspens, now thundering like breakers on a rocky coast. There is no mood of passion, no aspiration or vision of good, which it cannot convey to us through its multitudinous pipes; and all at the bidding of the musician's finger. It was a salutary revolution which slowly overcame the Puritan prejudice against the organ as an adjunct of worship; and while it has its dangers —dangers arising out of its very efficiency in providing a massive musical background for our congregational singing—there is no reason why it should usurp the place of the singing voice, but rather be an added inspiration for the more hearty and earnest uplifting of the human voice in praise. When people, choir, and instrument combine their forces in the service of song, and the right spirit is there, the high-water mark of efficiency in worship is attained in any assembly of devout souls.

This being so, it is fit and meet that we should on such an occasion consider something of the religious message of music itself, thus passing from the immediate occasion to the more general aspects of a great subject. For while music has often been "procuress to the lords of hell," when prostituted to the service of human passion and depravity, there can be no doubt that in itself music has a truly religious significance, and it is most needful that we should realise what that is for our soul's health and benefit.

I

I begin by pointing out that music—which is one of the finest forms of art—illustrates the service

which matter in its nobler functions renders to mind, as its exponent and handmaid.

It is time we had done with the crude notion, fostered by half a century of materialistic science, that mind is only a function of matter, a light playing upon an abyss, an ethereal effluence breathing above the more highly organised forms of physical existence. It is time that we should recognise that, at every point of its manifold activity, matter is but the condition which enables mind to realise its true wealth and fulfil its own purposes. Matter is not the ultimate form of existence, for we never know it but as presented to mind ; and while mind depends on matter for its self-manifestation, matter depends on mind for its claim to any reality at all. The so-called philosopher who said that "matter secretes mind as the liver secretes bile," did not even know the conditions of the problem he was discussing. But we need not enter on the thorny path of metaphysics in a service like this in order to realise the truth I would emphasise here, the proof of which lies to hand in the experience of every one of us.

Let me borrow an illustration from one who has made this subject his own by the masterly way in which he has handled it. Professor Illingworth, in his book on the "Divine Immanence," writes thus : "Take the sunset, . . . a series of ethereal vibrations, merely mechanical in origin, and, as such, other than they seem, whose total effect is to create in us an optical illusion, making the sun and not the earth appear to move. Yet, as men watch its appearance, thoughts and feelings arise in their hearts that move their inmost being in numberless ways. Youth is fired to high ideals, age consoled with peaceful hopes,

saints as they pray see heaven opened, sinners feel strangely stirred. Mourners are comforted, weary ones rested, artists inspired, lovers united, worldlings purified and softened as they gaze. In a short half-hour all is over ; the mechanical process has come to an end ; the gold has melted into the grey. But countless souls meanwhile have been soothed, and solaced, and lifted up by that evening benediction from the far-off sky, and the course of human life to-day is modified and moulded by the setting of yesterday's sun." And what is thus done by the sunset is done also by other natural sights and sounds too numerous and familiar to mention. There is no common bush that does not at times flame with the Presence of God to someone or other ; no flower that blows but can give thoughts that "often lie too deep for tears"; no ordinary landscape that may not at any moment become translucent as a veil to some worshipping soul as it whispers, "Lo, God was here, and I knew it not!" Everywhere we come upon this sacred ministry of Nature ; we need only the seeing eye to become instantly aware that through everything there shines the Uncreated Presence, "who is above all, and through all, and in all."

But we must come to certain forms of noble art to realise this fact in its finest form. When we are looking at a beautiful picture, all we really see is a series of lines and groupings made by means of pigment on canvas, or of ink on paper ; yet what is not often suggested ? A whole range of noble emotions and uplifting thoughts are brought into being by realising the scene limned by the artist's skill out of the simplest materials. This is done still more adequately by poetry and dramatic art,

which bring home to us, through the medium of the written page, the story of human heroism or shame, of aspiration and self-sacrifice, and awaken the sublimest thoughts and the most ennobling inspirations in all those whose hearts are open to their quickening appeal.

Am I wrong in saying that music brings this priestly function of Nature to its purest development? When we hear a great oratorio, what happens? A series of rhythmic material vibrations in fit sequence and co-ordination strike the tympanum of the ear—that is all. These break into sensation on the mental side, and cause exquisite pleasure to the trained and appreciative auditor—a pleasure, by the way, very difficult to understand from the psychological side. But above and beyond this there is awakened in the soul a sense of a higher and ampler and more perfect order of being, a vision of spiritual possibilities, a longing after holiness and love and all things fair and good, such as is stirred within us by nothing else in the world. The very vagueness of these inner movings of the spirit, awakened by the harmonies of music, constitute their greatest charm; we are brought into fellowship with Him who has no form or outline, but who is the very breath of our life, the substance of our being, and whose Spirit bloweth where it listeth. When Handel was asked how he felt when he was writing the Hallelujah Chorus, he replied: "Methought I saw the Lord God upon His throne, and the multitude which no man can number, crying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts!'"—and there are millions in whom the rendering of that masterpiece has awakened the same ecstatic experience. For—

"Here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
Existent behind all laws, that made them, and, lo, they are!
And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star!"

II

Can we analyse a little more closely the influence exercised over us by noble music? I think we can. At the risk of being a little fanciful, I will venture to point out that in the elements that go to make up good music we find a strange analogy to certain facts in our spiritual life.

1. Without pressing it unduly, there is a threefold aspect to the function of music which reminds us of the threefold nature of man—body, soul, and spirit. The *body* of music is the physical vibration that lies at the base of it all; a remarkable quality of matter so widespread that it is said that there is no form of matter—unless it be certain forms of clay—which cannot, under appropriate stimuli, be made to give forth these rhythmic pulses. The *soul* of music is the sensations which these vibrations awaken in the sensitive organism of the mind, which corresponds so finely to the stimulus, that a trained ear can detect a difference in the vibrations corresponding to the sixty-fourth part of a semitone. The *spirit* of music is its higher message, its revealing, quickening power, which finds us in the deepest place of our complex nature, and fills us with joy and a sense of enlargement and health.

2. But let us go into a more rewarding region of analogy. Musical effects depend on three factors. The first is *melody*, which gives direction and fit sequence to the sounds, corresponding to what we

call purpose in human life ; the second is *rhythm*, whereby periodic notes are accentuated or made more prominent than others, corresponding to balance or proportion, an intelligent sense of value or quality in our higher life ; the third is *harmony*, whereby sounds are joined together simultaneously in such a way as to swell the melody, and give colour to the rhythm, and so to enrich the general effect. This corresponds to the co-ordination of the various powers of the individual soul to a common end, enriching the main purpose of life with all kinds of harmonious subsidiary interests, so carrying forward the whole man in the direction of the main currents of his life. A man of full personality thus has something of the very soul of music in him. He is purposeful, and that purpose is the forthputting of his individuality in the direction of an end that is peculiarly his own, and makes him what he is ; he is discriminating, putting first things first, and laying emphasis on those principles and activities that are worthy of his highest solicitude and best efforts : he is harmonious in the output of his resources, all his passions and sensibilities working together in happy co-operation with the ordered ends of his life, giving volume and richness and scope to all he is and does. A life devoid of these three elements is life lacking in all distinction ; it is like a mere voice that has no musical quality in it, and falls dull and meaningless on the world's pulsing ear. Lives that are aimless ; lives that are void of any principle of discrimination between what is important and what is negligible ; lives that are full of discord within—what shall we say of them but that there is no soul-music in them, and that their doom is " with all that dies " ? Oh for a life with a clear-running,

melodious current of purpose in it: that shows a clear emphasis on all that is pure, noble, and of "good report"; that is rich in co-ordinated and well-trained powers, and in affinity with all that is best in the world outside it and above it! Such a life is a well-balanced symphony, and it fulfils a function higher than any work of art can ever do, for it is the reality of which the finest art is but the dim shadow and reflection; it is the stuff of which music at its best is but a faint echo.

III

Co-operation in Music.—Carrying on the analogy still farther and striking out a broader path, we may say that in the rendering of music which calls for the combined efforts of many executants, we have the finest results of the voluntary co-operation of human wills, for which in the world of action we still for the most part look in vain.

It is one of the essential conditions of good music well rendered that everything should be done in exact accordance with law and order. When an oratorio is sung, the slightest variation from the strict rendering of time and tune and harmony results in the most painful and distracting trouble of mind in those who hear it. Voices and instruments must all do their part with unfailing faithfulness to what is laid down for them in the score. And when a completed piece of music is thus accurately rendered by a large choir and orchestra, the pleasure it gives is not merely physical; is mainly spiritual. It gives us an exhilarating and unique pleasure to listen to such a perfect co-ordination of human skill, voluntarily and gladly given for a common end; and when we turn back again to the world of life, with its shocks and

conflicts of will in the community, with its senseless clashings of purpose and its inconsistencies of effort, our hearts sink within us at the contrast. "When, oh, when," we cry, "will men combine in society, in commercial life, in politics, in religion, in the same happy co-ordination of purpose, and send up to heaven such a symphony of loving and mutually helpful service as is done in the mimic world of music?" When men and women obey the laws of well-being in real life as they consent to obey the laws of sound in an oratorio, then shall we see the "new heaven and new earth" wherein dwelleth righteousness. When that time comes, and the individual takes his rightful place among his fellows, devoting his trained and disciplined powers to the service of his fellow-men without any thought of vainglory, but only that he may swell the volume of the common good, giving the best that is in him freely to others, and receiving into his own life in turn all they have to give to him, then will arise for the first time in human history that symphony of holiness and love for which the world was made at first, to the threshold of which it has taken centuries of sorrow and suffering, futility and failure, to bring us.

Thank God, we are already making a beginning in some directions. Curiously enough, the most impressive region in which the principle of mutual dependence and perfect co-ordination has been developed has been the art of war. In the ideal army, the subordination of the interests and will of the individual to that of the community is almost perfect. The soldier consecrates the whole of himself (and that at its best) to the service of his cause, without any thought of his own safety, or benefit, even though it cost him his life in so doing. The

thrill of the common life is in him, and because all the others feel likewise, the total force and efficiency of an army is tenfold that of the individual soldiers added together.

But there are regions of activity even in civil life which are already well advanced to the same goal. Have you ever realised how wonderful is the perfection of organisation which makes it possible for a letter, posted in a wayside pillar-box on a Yorkshire moor, to be unfailingly delivered at its destination, though it be at the ends of the earth? And this is possible because in this matter the whole civilised world has come to see that it is to the interest of everyone and of all that the most trivial message from one man to another should be safely delivered, and so all the machineries of travel and all the organisations of government are put at his disposal almost for nothing. When one considers through how many hands a letter has to pass, how complicated and yet unfailingly are the co-ordinations of effort that speed it on its way, and how faithfully and willingly these are discharged before it lies safely in the hand of its recipient, how wonderful it seems! When will men realise the lesson of the post-office, and recognise that what is done smoothly and without friction in this comparatively small detail of life, can, when they make up their minds to be mutually kind and helpful, be applied to all the relationships of life, be they little or be they great, and that in doing so the good of each can be attained by the help of all and the good of all by the faithful performance by each of his part in the interchange of mutual benefits? Let us pray and work that this good time may soon come! It will be like the coming of the Lord Himself into our midst!

IV

We have been led into deep places by suggestions that come to us from the fairyland of music. But we have not yet touched the deepest place of all; we have not heard the highest word that music has to teach us. The reason why we are stirred to our inmost heart by the sweet melodies and measured harmonies of music is because she leads us into that ideal world where all is fair, and sweet, and beautiful, and where even discords are made subservient to a fuller and finer harmony. For a short time we are taken out of this poor world of strife, of broken purposes, of ineffectual relationships, and transported to a sphere where to will is to do, to wish is to have, to love is to be loved, where life is at its richest and ripest, and where God Himself lives and moves and has His being.

Is not this the reason why the Bible has so many references to music in its pictures of the state of the blessed dead? It is fashionable nowadays to sneer at these as crude and materialistic images. A lady not otherwise undevout once complained to me that these pictures of a heaven, where the only occupation would be to "play on a harp and sing hymns" to all eternity, filled her with an inexpressible weariness, and had always done so from a child—as well they might if they had to be taken in their naked literalness, and not as dream-pictures, which must be interpreted through their spiritual suggestions. But that were to show that we are yet "in our sins" so far as understanding these lovely word-parables are concerned.

A little while after this conversation I was privileged to hear Paderewski rendering one of Bee-

thoven's finest sonatas, and this conversation came back to me with vivid force. Under the magician's wand I was carried instantly into a realm in which the inner soul of music seemed to be laid bare, a realm where all was harmony and sweetness and light, where failure and evil and sin seemed to be shrivelled up in the blaze of a Divine and holy love, where the mute strivings of the soul suddenly found their solution, and the dreams of good that haunt us with so tantalising a pain in this lower world became more real than the solid earth and the liquid sky. In the ecstasy of that moment, how wretchedly inadequate appeared all these literalisms which fail to translate the Bible pictures of heaven into their spiritual equivalents! Surely we still need to be emancipated from the tyranny of the letter, and to remember that the very prose of the Bible is full of poetry, and that in these flashing pictures of the ideal state we are to read a meaning so fair and pure that language at its best can only faintly suggest the supernal reality. When we read of golden harps and crowns, of walls of jasper and gates of pearl, we are moving not among physical objects, but among parables of those things "which eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

It is in this sense that we must read our text. When we hear of the "voice from heaven as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder," and of the "voice of harpers harping with their harps," and of "the new song" which they sang, "which no one could sing save them that had been redeemed from the earth," we hear of that which means the emancipation of the soul from the trammels of sense, and from the limitations of this

lower world, where we may, if we do our part to win the privilege, "come to our own," and realise all those things that here and now come to us only in dim suggestion and in broken arcs. For

> "All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist;
> Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power,
> Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
> When eternity shall affirm the conception of an hour.
> The high that proved too high, the heroic that proved too hard,
> The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
> Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
> Enough that He heard it once: *we shall hear it by-and-by*."

So let us beat out our life-music as far as in us lies, here, "on this homely earth," and in God's good time we shall hear it in its fulness in a better world hereafter.

X

THE TWO INCARNATIONS

"When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."—GAL. IV. 4-6.

DISENTANGLING the root-idea in this passage from its temporary environment, we have here a statement of the essential Gospel of Jesus Christ for mankind. It was a message realised in a double Incarnation, both historic, both spiritual, both life-giving. There was first the "sending forth" of God's son in Jesus of Nazareth, "made of a woman, made under the law," limited, that is, by the narrow bounds of our humanity, and by the narrower bounds of time and place and particular circumstance. There was, secondly, the sending forth of the "Spirit of God's Son" into the hearts of His people—a reincarnation on a wider and ampler scale of His power and life, still within the boundaries of humanity, but not limited to one particular manifestation in time and place; on the other hand, a vital spiritual force capable of manifesting itself everywhere and through all time. According to St. Paul here, the first Incarnation mainly had a backward look, it was a fulfilment and a consummation of the long historical process of the past and the end of all previous history; but the second Incarnation had a forward look, it was

a fresh start in the evolution of the race, a new realisation of larger and higher spiritual possibilities, the promise "of a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."

The first Incarnation was a manifestation of God's grace in man; interpreted and completed the long story of His past dealings with the race. The second opens a new and finer chapter in His relation to them; but both have one and the same ultimate purpose in view—to reveal the Fatherhood in God, and to quicken the sense and quality of virtual sonship in men, whereby we cry in our hearts, "Abba, Father!"

I say that this is a statement of the Christian revelation in its essential principle, and it is as true for us to-day as for the Apostle Paul. The trouble is that what presented itself to earlier believers as a grand discovery, a soul-quickening vision, a redeeming power, presents itself to the modern mind as a problem and a difficulty. And therefore there is a perpetual call on us to endeavour to retranslate the immemorial truth of the Incarnation into modern speech, so that it may be as persuasive and emancipating for the men of to-day as it was for the men of the first and of subsequent centuries. May I ask your indulgence while I endeavour to throw out a few suggestive lines of thought?

I

The first Incarnation: "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law," or, to parallel the same thought as expressed by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "for He took not on Him the nature of angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham."

What, in simple terms, does this mean but that when God gave His supreme revelation of His own essential nature in its relation to humanity, He came not as an alien to our planet, but as a native? Not in angelic form, robed in the brightness of a far-away mystery, lifted high in His temple—not so did He come; but as a Man, as a definite individual, along a recognised line of descent, with the marks of the village on His face and form, one of the common people, a Hebrew of the first century. What to Paul was the outstanding and amazing mystery of the Incarnation was that there should be so little outward mystery about it; and the deeper wonder of it was that through its common, everyday human aspect there shone forth from the heart of it an inner mystery of quickening light and power that made life glorious for all who accepted it as God's truth for them. The wonder of the Incarnation: "Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh!" The wisdom of it: "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God!" Such was the great fact of the Incarnation for the first believers.

Now we have entangled ourselves from early times in a mesh of metaphysical or ontological difficulties in our thoughts on this subject, from which it would be well for us to break away—at least, I am not going to indulge in any such speculations just now. Let me rather speak of the Gospel of Incarnation as the Gospel of Personality, perhaps the greatest word in any language, and fortunately a word whose greatness and fulness of meaning are felt in the inner experience of every man. When we say "God was incarnated in Jesus Christ," what we really mean is that He "personalised" Himself to our vision in Him as His Son. For faith and for experience

what we mean is that in the person of "Jesus we hear the voice of God speaking to our conscience as nowhere else in history, and through submission to Him we are conscious of a moral and spiritual transformation which requires God for its explanation" (Adams Brown). This is the least, and not the most, that can be said on the subject; but it is best just at present to reduce the case to its lowest terms, for the sake of those who find it impossible to rise to any metaphysical conception of Incarnation.

"The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"—that is Christianity. It is a Gospel of personality; God shining in upon us through the countenance of One who is bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, and who also is one with God in the recesses of His spirit, so "making of twain one," that else were divided by a chasm no thought could bridge and no vision could span from our side.

And could there be any revelation more effectual, moving, convincing? Could God, who is a Person, make Himself known to us who are persons, except in and through a personality? "We live as persons in a world of persons; they touch us at more points, they affect us in more ways, and with greater intensity fit more closely into the faculties and powers of our own being, than anything else in the universe. Personality is the greatest fact we know; it is a fact raised to its highest terms." And as it is the highest fact of our experience, God could not have made Himself known to us adequately for our needs except through and in a personality. Thus it comes about that the greatest fact of history is "Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God."

And personality, as it is the greatest of facts, is also the greatest of forces. The world is moved by

personality, and ultimately only by personality. Organisation is powerful, and institutions are powerful; but the power in them comes from the persons who founded them, or who work through them. Truth is mighty and must prevail; but its might never makes itself really felt except as it fills some person with its passion and makes him the voice of its power. Christianity has a doctrine, and it has an organisation, but the force of our religion is the Person at its heart, which gives vitality to its organisation and reality to its doctrine. We are being reminded nowadays that the chief truths and doctrines of Christianity may be matched from other religions, and that the working concepts of the New Testament—the Kingdom of God, Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, the Man from Heaven, the Christ—are all drawn from the theologic furniture of current Judaism. What of that? This circle of ideas were all dead or dormant till Jesus came; at His touch they flamed into life. They were transfigured; instead of being dead dogmas, they flashed into eternal truths—nay, He was at once seen to be the Truth which they dimly adumbrated, the reality and the power they faintly suggested. Every modern attempt to account for Christianity by showing the historic pedigree of its concepts is as vain as to account for the streams of our highlands by tracing them to their sources in the hills; their real source is the everlasting sun, which draws the waters of the sea to himself and then sends them dancing down the mountain sides. That is to say, the living, vital force in our faith comes from Him whom men have recently been inanely calling its Founder, but who is really its Soul, and of whom the only adequate account is given in Tennyson's words:

"And so the Word had breath and wrought
With human hands the creed of creeds
In loveliness of perfect deeds,
More strong than all poetic thought."

It is this which explains what is called the self-assertion, or self-emphasis of Christ as a Teacher. This was why He appealed to men not to believe what He said, but to believe in Him. This was why He founded not a college of professors, but a school of disciples. This was why he said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This was why He said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." This was why He said, "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Myself." He attached men not to His doctrine, but to Himself, because He was conscious that love to Himself, faith in Himself, service for Himself, was the condition of fruitful living and doing, as God's self-expression in humanity, distracted and perplexed as it is with error and sin.

II

Great and essential, however, as was the first Incarnation, when "it pleased God to send forth His Son, born of a woman, made under the law," it is but half of Christianity, and even the less vital half. The historic Jesus did not create Christianity; He but fulfilled the past and prepared the way for the future. Wonderful, beautiful, glorious as was that life of self-sacrifice, that personal revelation of the heart of the Eternal, the world would never have been conquered if that were all. How can a fact in the distant past create the living present? The first Incarnation would have been stillborn but that it led

to the second. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father!" This was the real birthday of Christianity—when the risen and exalted Christ sent forth His Spirit into the hearts of His people, and made them feel that, though in the unseen, He was still with them, nay, was henceforth in them, so that all true believers could say, as Paul boldly said of himself, "I live, and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me."

What wonder is this that so many men have claimed through the ages, that within their life there is another life, that quickening their personality at its core there is the presence of a larger, loftier personality, so that while and when most themselves, and their best selves, there is a conviction that they are more than themselves in virtue of the Christ within? The explanation, as Professor Percy Gardner says, is this: "He who came to earth as Jesus has dwelt there to our day as Christ. The Christian consciousness of our day is one with the consciousness which set apart the followers of Christ from the world from the day when the Apostles first realised that, though their Master was hidden from sight, He was with them unto the end of the world. And when contemporary Christians claim that they, like St. Paul, have learned to live in communion with and in dependence on the heavenly Christ, we are bound to take their claim seriously."* And what is this claim?

It is not merely that they have meditated on the beauty and holiness of the Blessed Life till its quality has permeated their thoughts, till its pity has made them pitiful, and its purity has made them pure, and

* Hibbert Journal Supplement, "Jesus or Christ?" p. 56.

its love has made them loving, though it has done all that. It is a consciousness that has varied greatly in its intensity at different times and in different people—a consciousness which comes and goes and returns again, but which has never vanished from the world since Jesus lived, that men may share the very life of their Lord, and that in the power of this common life they have fellowship with God in a sense they had never been able to realise before.

This is the ultimate fact of Christianity—the continuous and unbroken communication of Christ's own life to those whose faith has linked them to Him. Once more we come back to that wonder-working personality—no longer embedded in history in a far-away century, but perpetually creative in the souls of men—" the something behind Cross, Gospel, Church, Scriptures, doctrines, changed characters, social transformations," from which stream out the forces that have made the world perpetually new! The Apostle John gave the secret when he wrote, " This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" "Believers in Him "—*i.e.*, not as a glorious Figure in the past, but as a redeeming Presence in Now and the Here and the Me!

How history has vindicated the self-emphasis of Christ of which I spoke just now! Read the book of Acts and the Epistles, and see how the company of believers was gathered as units out of that scoffing, hurrying, reckless Roman world in the day of its greatest pride and tyranny, and was welded into a compact and organic Church under the spell of the personal love which He awoke. Read the story of Christianity through the ages, and see how

amid the turbulent forces of history this pure stream flows as the hurrying Jordan is said to flow through the Sea of Galilee without mingling its waters. Always what has given life to religion is the magic of the name and love of Christ. The Church has often been corrupt, and still oftener weak and ailing, but that has always been when the love of Christ has waned in the hearts of His people, and when they have put His doctrine or His Church in the central place that belongs only to Himself. And when the Church has revived it has always been revived by the spell of His presence, and the answering power of His love in the hearts of believing men and women. The only immortal undying thing in the religion or Christ has been the presence of Christ in the hearts of His people.

And is it not so in our own hearts? When have we felt best able to conquer sin, and do good without wearying? Has it not been when we were most conscious of Jesus Christ, of His love, His presence, His power and grace, in our life? When we have grown helpless, discontented, tired out and useless, has it not been because we have for a time lost hold of Him, and gone our own way in our own strength? And it would be easy to tell you of the testimony of Christian missions all over the world—that the pulse of their power over men of all creeds, and habits, and races, and civilisations, has been the power of Christ. It is what He was, what He did, nay, what He is, and what He can do for men, that makes His religion the potent thing it is. He makes God real, and heaven real, and the soul feels its own reality by the touch of His own living spirit.

Brethren, there are many mysteries—deep unsolved mysteries—behind this word Incarnation, the key-

word of my sermon this evening. I cannot solve them for you, nor you for me. They will never be solved, let us be sure of that. But there are mysteries of darkness, and there are mysteries of light, and this is a mystery of light, for it has light at its core. And I would have you lose the mystery in the light, not the light in the mystery. As Browning says :

> "I say acknowledgment of God in Christ,
> Accepted by the reason, solves for thee
> All questions in the earth or out of it."

Now, if this is true, then is life a great thing, with a Divine meaning in it and a Divine end for it. The horizon of our nature lifts and spreads out, and takes in heaven itself within its scope. Forgiveness becomes a mighty fact and a mighty power. Duty takes on a warmer look ; trouble ceases to be real calamity ; death loses its ultimate terror ; immortality becomes a sure hope. The Incarnation transfigures the universe for all who can really accept it in its fullest implications.

And therefore, my dear friends, I pray you to live in the light of this great fact—that in Jesus Christ God has come to us, and spoken with us, and offered Himself for us and to us, that we may offer ourselves to Him, and so be filled with His fulness. Let its light shine on your daily path. Let its glory pierce your darkest moments. Let its grace meet all your need. Let its hope brighten all your shadows. "Great is the mystery" of religion, that God should become human ; but greater is its inspiration, for its end is that "man may become Divine."

But what say you if this great Christian truth of Incarnation is hidden from you ? That in Jesus you cannot see more than the flower and perfection of

our humanity in its upward reach towards God? That more than that seems the fruit of a beautiful but illusive religious fantasy? Then cling to the truth you have; live by it. You can never climb to any higher truth till you have mastered that; but do not be satisfied with any truth less than the highest to which you can attain. For one thing is clear—the finest fruits of Christian living and character have been reached by those who have risen into a sense of conscious fellowship with Christ as the Son of God, as the way to the Father. It is good to be on the foothills of glory; but it is better to climb the highest peak. So let me conclude with Richard Watson Gilder's fine verse:

"If Jesus Christ be a man,
And only a man, I say
That of all mankind I will cleave to Him,
And to Him will I cleave alway.

"But if Jesus Christ be a God,
And the only God, I swear
I will follow Him through heaven and hell,
The earth, the sea, and the air!"

XI

THE FUTURE RELATIONS OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

(Preached at Nether Chapel, Sheffield, during the Visit of the British Association for the Advancement of Science to that City in 1911)

"For He is our peace, . . . to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."—Ephes. ii. 14-17.

The argument of this chapter deals with the unifying power of the Cross of Christ, in view of the racial enmity that prevailed in the world at the time when the Apostle wrote. Jew and Roman and Greek had long been divided by antipathies so deep-rooted and stubborn as to appear quite impassable. Neither political union nor common interests availed to soften these asperities and alienations. Yet in the Early Church the Gospel had done what neither reason nor political union, nor a sense of common human interests, had availed to do. The Cross of the Redeemer, by reconciling men to God, had reconciled them to one another. In the Christian community, the fanatical Jew, the cultured Greek, the proud, imperious Roman, were joined in a common brotherhood, in which all enmity was slain and love ruled supreme. If we take these national types as representative of three often disparate tendencies in the

world in every age, and which work for exclusiveness, the primitive Church stands in miniature for what the world at large will become when Jesus has had His way with men. These three tendencies are the pride of religion, the pride of culture, the pride of power, and they may be said to be represented to-day by three leading figures in the community—the theologian, the scientist, and the engineer; the first standing for organised religious thought, the second for secular learning, the third for the practical control of mankind over the natural forces. There is, of course, nothing in the nature of things why these three types should be antagonistic, for they represent abiding interests of humanity in relation to God, to the universe, and to each other; but, as a matter of fact, they have often been bitterly and contemptuously opposed. The theologian and the scientist, it is well known, have been locked in an age-long warfare, and though the practical man and the thinker have at last come to understand each other better, seeing that theory and practice are seen to be but two sides of the same shield of progress, there is still the ancient schism to be healed between those who represent the secular and spiritual interests of the race. It is my purpose in this discourse to say something that I trust may be helpful as an aspect of this schism—that between science and religion.

I

The Conflict of Theology and Science.—Let me begin with a brief outline of the relations of these two in the past, which have been so unfriendly. The question may well be asked how it ever came to pass that such unfriendliness should have arisen. The object of religion is to enlarge and deepen our

knowledge of God and of His will towards men, and to perfect our relation to Him ; the object of science, physical and mental, is to deepen our knowledge of the universe and of our own nature, and to perfect the relations between the two. Put in this way, there seems no reason whatever why the two lines of thought and activity should not be completely harmonious and mutually helpful. To know God on the one side, and the universe He has made on the other—what possible point of conflict can there be between two such aspects of knowledge ? Is not the knowledge of the universe and of our own nature one avenue to the knowledge of its Creator? And if we know God, His attributes and His will for us, must not that shed a glorious light on the universe and our relation to it ? There can be but one answer to such questions. And if we were beginning the two lines of investigation together *de novo*, with a blank page behind us, it is doubtful if ever a point of antagonism could arise. How, then, did it arise as a matter of fact?

It arose for a very simple reason. Long before organised science began its triumphant career theology was in possession of the field. Far back in the dim ages, before even literature began, men had their thoughts and beliefs about God and about His relation to the universe and to man. These beliefs, from their very nature, took on a sacred and inviolable aspect, for they are held to be revealed by God Himself. And, of course, man always had his beliefs about the constitution of the universe ; and by a natural process these ideas got inwoven into the texture of his beliefs about God, for there was in ancient times no delimitation of territory between sacred and profane knowledge. When, therefore,

scientific thought began to break loose from its theological moorings, and to assert its right to follow its own unimpeded path, it threatened to disturb the settled convictions of men about God as well as the universe, and theologians began to cry out against all progress in scientific thought as a sacrilege against religion. Not only did this tend to disturb many vested interests, but to endanger religion itself. We cannot very well wonder at this, but it had a disastrous effect, and led to ages of bitter and acrimonious controversy, the last waves of which are only now beginning to quieten down. Let me say distinctly, that while theologians have been greatly to blame for the way most of them have acted, and the spirit they have shown during the controversy, the blame has not been all on the one side, as is often taken for granted. Many scientists have shown a scornful and bitter spirit in their attacks on orthodox religious thought, and while most of the best scientific thinkers have been Christian men, they have allowed their unbelieving colleagues to attack religion without protest as though it were their common enemy, till the world at large has come to imagine that all thinking men are necessarily anti-Christian, or at least agnostic. Nor have scientists always shown the right spirit in their controversies with one another, as the following passage from Herbert Spencer clearly shows. There are orthodoxies and heresies in science as well as in theology. To quote his own words: "The new biological orthodoxy behaves just as the old biological orthodoxy did. In the days before Darwin, those who occupied themselves with the phenomena of life passed by with unobservant eyes the multitudinous facts which point to an evolutionary origin for plants

and animals, and they turned deaf ears to those who insisted upon the significance of these facts. Now that they have come to believe in this evolutionary origin, and have at the same time accepted the hypothesis that natural selection has been the sole cause of the evolution, they are similarly unobservant of the multitudinous facts which cannot be rationally ascribed to that cause, and turn a deaf ear to those who would draw their attention to them. The attitude is the same, it is only the creed that is different." In fact, it is a feature of human nature that we tend to resist any attempt to introduce a drastic change into our system of beliefs about anything, and we must not be hard on those who refuse to follow our lead, nor complain too loudly against those who attempt to change our views of life and of the world as a whole. Nor should we forget that much so-called science is as purely hypothetical as much of the theology of the past, and it is right for all new ideas to be tested and sifted, expounded and attacked, in all possible ways in order that the truth should emerge in its purity at last.

II

The Resistless March of Truth.—What, then, are we to learn from the conflict between science and religion?

1. In the first place, we may learn that it is in the end quite useless, and therefore foolish, to attempt to hinder the light and power of truth. In the end it is bound to win its way. To buttress up old-fashioned ways of thinking because they are old or have been thought sacred, and because we fear the effect of disturbing men's minds, may be natural for us, but it is not right for those who are told to "buy the truth and sell it not" to oppose fresh ways of

looking at things because they are new and unfamiliar. Every old theology was new at one time, and had to fight its way to acceptance against the beliefs which it displaced, exactly as is the case to-day. The point is not whether an idea is new or old, but whether it is true ; and if so, we cannot stand against it, except at our peril. The open mind is the only honest mind ; and once we are convinced of the falsity of our views, it is our bounden duty to give them up in favour of those that are in harmony with the facts of experience.

2. Another lesson we may learn from the story of this conflict is the impossibility of ever getting rid of religion by any process of scientific reasoning. Religions come and go ; but religion as an abiding fact in the soul of man remains, and will remain so long as man continues. In this matter anthropological science has done theology an immense and abiding service. It has proved beyond question that wherever man is found, and however low or high his civilisation may be, he is everywhere and always normally a religious creature. His views of God may change as his views of the universe change, but "God and the soul," as Browning says, "stand sure," and the two will ever seek each other and come into relations of communion. It is no argument against religion that there have been so many religions, and that men's ideas of God, even when they profess the same religion, differ, for this is true of all departments of knowledge. The science of yesterday is not the science of to-day, and the science of to-morrow will be different in many ways from that of to-day. The science that does not change soon proves itself no science at all ; and the same is true of theology, which is, in a sense, the highest of all sciences, in that it deals with the most important

of all human interests. We are not bound to accept any new theology or any new science simply because it is new ; but there must be constant restatement of truth, whether secular or sacred, in order to keep pace with the ever-growing life and experience of mankind. Let us, at least, be sure of this—that no truly scientific discovery in the world of physics, or psychology, or history, can ever in the least degree disturb the reality of man's spiritual life ; least of all can it disturb the reality of the greatest and highest of all faiths, the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is destined in some form or other to be what it always has been, the light and the joy of those who truly experience its benefits. I do not know what revisions and reconstructions of Christian theology may be in front of us in the long ages of the future, but it is to my mind inconceivable that the Christian religion in its essence, which has met the deepest needs and provided the highest experiences of the soul in its relation to God, will ever lose its hold on the world and become a mere memory and a name.

III

In the light of these thoughts, can any forecast be made of the future relations between religion and science ? This is no light task, but it may be possible to suggest what their normal relations ought to be in the light of the past which we have been considering.

1. I begin by suggesting that there must be a clearer delimitation of territory between the two. The function of science, let us repeat, is to extend our knowledge of our own nature and of the universe we live in with a view of readjusting our relations with our earthly environment and of perfecting our control over the conditions of our life. This is a great, a noble, and a beneficent aim. If we

rightly and soberly use our knowledge, it can lead to nothing but good for all. Anyone reading the reports of the brilliant series of meetings being held in this city just now cannot doubt for a moment that if men could be brought to live according to the laws of well-being that are constantly being recognised and defined more clearly by our scientific thinkers, the well-being of the race would be advanced by leaps and bounds.

The function of religion, again, as we have seen, is to lead us to a clearer knowledge of God, and to perfect our relations with Him as our Father and Lord. This is to be done primarily by seeking His fellowship, accepting His offered help and grace, and living according to His revealed will. It is the sole purpose of all theologies, and religious services and fellowships, to further this end. If no bar is put, therefore, in the way of scientific progress by the institutions or the representatives of religion—and the day, happily, is gone by for any such attempt to be renewed—those who represent scientific thought and life can have no quarrel with either Churches or theologians. Let each regiment in the army of progress fill its own place and fight its own battles with the ignorance, the indifference, or the hostility of the world at large, and cease to fight each other, especially as there can be only imaginary occasions of enmity between them. These are the plain dictates of reason and common sense.

2. But that is surely not enough. The spiritual and material interests of mankind are at bottom one, and not diverse, and those who represent these interests ought no longer to pursue them apart, but rather in a warm and hearty reliance on one another. It is a calamity that they were ever divided; it is a greater calamity that they are still inclined to be

mutually suspicious and to hold aloof, as is unquestionably the case on the whole. It would be nothing short of a crime if this were to continue much longer. Again:

3. The theologian and the religious reformer can no longer pretend to be independent of the scientist. In earlier and simpler times this was possible. The growth of scientific thought, with all its practical applications and social consequences, has made it increasingly difficult for vast masses of people to live a holy, happy, healthy life. It is useless to preach to thousands of our fellow-citizens while the conditions of their existence make it almost impossible for them to be normal men and women. It is useless to expect the advent of the social millennium till we have mastered the conditions of decent living. And how this may be attained must be the work of the expert scientific investigator and thinker. These investigators and thinkers are studying these problems by the thousand, and the pick of them are assembled in this city to-day. I urge that it is the duty of our preachers, religious thinkers, and spiritual leaders to be in hearty alliance with such men, who are giving their trained powers and time freely and earnestly to the solution of our social as well as our intellectual problems. It is impossible to resist the impression conveyed by the briefest reports of these gatherings that this army of trained thinkers is filled with a consuming zeal for the welfare of their fellow-men, and that their dearest desire is to make their life strong and virile and healthy for all. The martyrs of science during the last century have been legion, as were the martyrs of the Church in ruder ages; and there have been, and are, multitudes of scientific devotees who live only that they may help forward the progress and well-being of mankind. I say,

therefore, that it is our duty as religious men and women to acknowledge the services and help forward the efforts of these distinguished leaders in scientific thought by every means in our power. It is at our peril that we shall neglect this duty and privilege. Let all suspicion of the aims and efforts of scientific men be laid aside, with all malice, and let us join the noble army of reformers ourselves as a simple act of homage of their worth, as well as a fulfilment of our own function of making the world a better place in which to live and work.

4. And may I suggest, in conclusion, that the scientific cannot any longer afford to neglect or to despise the religious thinker? For what is his aim, also, but the betterment and salvation of mankind? More than this, is it not becoming ever clearer that his aim is not only to save men from the consequences of evil-doing and living in the world to come, but in this world as well? And let me ask, Is it not ever clearer that it is not enough to show men how to live their lives at their best, which is the limit of the scientist's function? Is it not true that the best way to know the law of life is always to do it? That the chiefest thing is not to extend the knowledge of that way, important as this is, but to provide adequate motive power to walk along it? And what is the practical function of religion but to rehabilitate and enrich these higher motives of life? To make men not only willing but able to live up to their knowledge of their duties? To fill them with power to translate knowledge into conduct? Alas! is it not clear that we all *know* much more than we *do* of what is good, and holy, and pure, and loving; and that what we need most is a reinforcement and uplifting from on high that will make natural and easy what is now so hard and difficult?

There is only one sure way of attaining the power to be the men we ought to be, and that is through the acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the open door of God's grace for all mankind. That Gospel, as we see in the passage which provides us with our text to-night, succeeded in the earliest ages of its power in breaking down the barriers between man and man as well as between man and God. The bitterest racial and class hatred melted like ice in sunshine beneath its mild and searching glow of love. The same power would, if it had its way, do the same for us in these days of class hatreds, business competitions, and social struggles. For the Gospel of the Cross of Christ slays human enmities by slaying the cause of them all, which is selfishness. It makes men consider the things of others as well as their own ; it makes them solicitous of the good of their fellows equally with their own good, for it identifies us with the interests of the race for whom Christ died.

Is it too much to dream that in the good days, which, I trust, may not be so very distant, there will be no longer any schism between knowledge and faith, between the halls of science and the Church of the Redeemer, but that all who labour for the good of man's soul, and mind, and body, and estate, will unite in a common spirit for their common end, which is no longer to leave this world a tangle and a wilderness, but turn it into an ordered kingdom of love and peace and progress, a kingdom of right relations between man and God, and between man and man—in a word, a Kingdom of God, where His will is done on earth as it is done in heaven ?

"Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!"

XII

"NOBLESSE OBLIGE"

(A Missionary Sermon)

"I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise."—Rom. i. 14.

We have here one of those lightning flashes into the inner mind of the Apostle Paul that gives us the secret of his missionary enthusiasm. Like so many of his characteristic sayings, it is put into the form of a paradox. The form of it is puzzling, and the meaning at first eludes us. It is difficult indeed at first blush to realise in what sense he could confess himself indebted to either Greeks or barbarians. He seems to be making himself a debtor to people to whom he owed nothing. If he had said that he was debtor to his own countrymen, there would be no difficulty in understanding what he meant, for every man owes more than he can ever repay to the people from whom he has sprung and to the land of his birth; nor is there any doubt whatever that Paul realised this debt to the full. But here he makes out that he lies under some deep fundamental obligation to the whole world—to all nations (for to a Jew Greeks and barbarians meant everybody except his own nation) and to every grade of culture ("wise and unwise"). And if we had asked him what these other people had done for him, he would

at once have answered—nothing. He had suffered many things at their hands, but he had received no benefits from them. None the less, the words of my text represent his deepest mind. His life was spent in endeavouring to discharge a debt so overmastering and imperative that he could never hope to overtake it. It was this that constituted his call to be the Apostle to the Gentiles—the great missionary Apostle; and it is this that explains the tireless energy, the unbounded devotion, the unquenchable ardour which drove him from one land and city to another preaching to all and sundry the "unsearchable riches of Christ." And when we have penetrated behind the outer form and husk of this saying to its inner meaning we shall find, not only the key to the life of St. Paul the missionary, but the master-motive of all true missionary effort in every age and land—a motive that will never be satisfied till all the world is evangelised, and "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea."

I

That motive is briefly and centrally this—the Gospel is God's gift to us, His free and royal gift; and we can only repay Him by passing on that gift to others. "Freely we have received" it from Him, "freely let us give" it to those who have it not.

This most assuredly is what Paul means here. He was always under a sense of the undeserved goodness of God as revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It had been to him a renewal of the very springs of spiritual life; it had given him a new heaven and a new earth. He had passed, as he puts it, from death unto life; from captivity into freedom; from

poverty to riches untold; from the misery of a life of hopeless striving after an impossible ideal into the glorious liberty and assured victory of the children of God. All this and more the Gospel had done for this man. How should he show his gratitude to God for this " unspeakable gift "? By a life of sacrificial penance? By oblations and offerings? By rituals and ceremonies? That was the old way of Jew and Gentile alike. But Paul had been seized with a different spirit from this—the spirit of his Master and ours, who came " not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." I can well imagine the thrill and impulse of that moment when it dawned for the first time on St. Paul that the only way to pay his debt to his Lord was to pass on the benefits of His grace to others. It was at once an emancipation and a commission. " It pleased God "—these are the words which tell of that hour of vision and discovery—" it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen." So the gift became a debt, and Paul forthwith gave his life to the spread of the Gospel among Greeks and barbarians, wise and the unwise, knowing that only so could he prove his gratitude to his Lord, and pay back something of the blessed obligation which thrilled his heart with perpetual stimulus as well as unspeakable joy.

And this, dear brethren, is the true missionary motive for all of us. There are other motives doubtless, but this is the only central and abiding motive—one that never fails, one that is adequate to the task, one that can never grow old, nor wear out, nor lose its urgency and power. In proportion as

we realise the value and the glory of the Gospel for ourselves, only so shall we be driven to pass it on to others who have it not. What is good for us, what brings us the forgiveness of our sins and power to sin no more, that must be good for every man; and we who know what it has done for us are bound to pass it on to all mankind. *Noblesse oblige.* It is a debt of honour.

II

This, indeed, is part of a great spiritual law which we often forget, and of which it will be well for us to be reminded. That law is this—that it is hardly ever possible for us to repay our spiritual debts to those to whom we primarily owe them.

In the lower world of exchange and barter it is different. In our business relations we must all pay our debts to those to whom they have been incurred, and the law is strict and cogent which demands that we should do this under penalties that are swift and sure. That is the central law of industrial and commercial life. It is the basis of all our business transactions.

But as soon as we pass from the world of commodities to the world of spiritual benefits, we are met by the fact that this direct interchange of benefits speedily becomes impossible. Only in the smallest matters can we repay one another what we owe. How, for instance, can we repay the social and intellectual and spiritual benefits which we owe to former ages? The great thinkers who have enriched our minds, the great reformers who laid down the foundations of our liberties, the great saints and martyrs, prophets and preachers, who have passed on to us the inspiration of their example, the glow of

their faith, the splendour of their inspiration—these have long since passed beyond the reach of our gratitude: we can only recognise the fact of our obligation to them, and erect tardy monuments (which they will never see) to their memory. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, that they without us should not be made perfect." They toiled for ends they never saw, and died for causes in whose victory they never shared, and we have entered into their inheritance. How, then, shall we prove our gratitude to them?

But it is not only to past ages we cannot pay our debts. We cannot repay a tithe of what we owe to those whom we have known in the flesh. Who of us, for instance, can ever repay our debt to our parents? What do we not owe to them? We owe, in a sense, everything to them—life itself, the patient tenderness and love that shielded us through long years of helpless infancy, the discipline and education of our childhood, our start in life, and often the memory of a noble example and of sweet piety. All this we owe to our parents; and however dutiful and loving we have been to them, have the best of us discharged that debt? Or, again, many of us owe an undying debt of gratitude to some favourite teacher, pastor, friend, now long since dead, who gave us the first impulse to a new life, and opened up to us the treasures of the grace of God. Did we ever, could we ever, repay that priceless boon to those, through whose devotion and kindness it came to us? Nay; to come closer still, who of us ever feels that we can repay each other the benefits of a noble friendship? It is one of the strange but rewarding aspects of such a relationship that each feels he owes the other more than he can ever repay, which

is what St. Paul means, I suppose, when he says, "Owe no man anything, save to love one another."

How, then, are we to pay these spiritual debts? God has provided for us a better way. We can never discharge our obligations to those who have enriched our lives with the highest benefits, but *we can pass them on.* Our debt to the past, let us pay it to the future; what the ages of long ago have deposited as a treasure in our lives, let us transmit, enriched by our own contribution, to the ages to come; our debt to our parents, let us pay it to our children; our debt to dear friends, let us pay it by being friends to those who need us most, here and now. That is Heaven's way of enabling us to discharge the gratitude we owe to others; and it is a far better way, as I have said, than if it were possible for us to repay those to whom our obligation is strictly due, for so are the ages knit together by "gold chains around the feet of God."

III

To return to our immediate subject. We now see the deep and moving significance of these words of St. Paul: "I am debtor to the Greeks and to the barbarians, to the wise and the unwise." He knew that the gift of the Gospel was a free gift of God to his soul, but not that he might keep it for himself. It was a trust: something to be enjoyed, but also to be shared, and to be shared most with those who needed it most. Thus it was his gratitude to his Lord that made him the Lord's missionary. It was as though he had heard some echo of that word of Jesus to His erring but faithful Peter: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" . . .

"Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee. . . ." "Feed my sheep; feed my lambs!" Our love to our Lord is the true motive of all Christian activities, and if we love Him well, we shall gladly spend and be spent for the world for which He died. Here is the nerve-centre of all the missionary work that was ever done in His name. It is supposed that our forefathers started the great modern missionary movement out of pure pity for the lost races of heathendom, who, as they thought, were doomed to eternal fire because they knew not the way of salvation. Certainly those who believed this were bound to do their utmost to save their fellow-men from a doom so terrible. But I refuse to believe that this was the deepest motive that urged them to this noble work. None, or very few of us, now hold the inhuman (not to say undivine) belief that the heathen are doomed to everlasting perdition through no fault of their own. Does that cut the nerve-centre of our missionary motive? Not in the least. For that motive is rooted in the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. "The love of Christ constrains us." That love has been to us redemption, justification, and sanctification; and what has been so much to us makes a claim upon us to pass it on to those who have it not.

But even this does not exhaust the meaning of this great text.

One commentator offers a fresh and suggestive reading of this remarkable utterance of St. Paul, which is very applicable to our own times. He says that there was one direction in which he did feel a real personal indebtedness to Greeks and barbarians, wise and unwise. He had been preaching the Gospel among them, as well as among his own

people, for many years, and had been privileged to see the fruit of his labour in many directions. At first his own faith in Christ had been somewhat uncertain and weak, though it grew ever stronger as he found its truth and power verified in his own experience. But as he went on preaching the good news of the kingdom year by year, and found how it wrought the same miracles in others as in his own life, a new source of confidence awoke in his heart. This objective line of evidence gradually deepened his own inward sense of confidence in the Gospel. He saw that the Cross of Christ which was at first an offence and a stumbling-block to fellow-countryman and foreigner alike, was "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believed." It met the spiritual needs of Jew and Gentile alike; it was a Gospel for the wise and the simple alike; it saved the free man and the slave alike from guilt and sin. And so, as he saw ever fresh proofs of this great fact, his own faith in his Lord became ever deeper and stronger and more joyful, and he felt it was his duty to go on preaching it to all the world as the one efficacious way of salvation for men of every clime and race.

My dear brethren, here is a line of thought that applies with special emphasis to our own position to-day. The last century was remarkable for two great movements of thought and life. It was the century of criticism, and it was the century of missions. Never since the coming of Christ was our religion attacked with such virulence and resourcefulness. From the historical, the philosophical, the literary points of view, Christianity was subjected to a fire of critical examination that was pitiless in its rigour. So thorough, indeed, was this attack, that we can

now say that there is no conceivable direction from which any fresh onslaught may be expected. And the faith of multitudes has been sorely tried in the process—nay, the whole fabric of Christian thought was at one time seriously shaken. If Christianity were a mere theory of life, it is doubtful if it could ever recover its old place in the hearts and minds of men.

But while this has been going on in the world of thought, another process has been going on in the world of experience. The nineteenth century was, as I have said, the century of missions. As the world was thrown open to travel and commerce and intercourse, there sprang up our great societies, and they sent their missionaries to every quarter of the globe; and from every quarter of the globe there has come back the unwavering testimony that the Gospel is more than a theory of life—it is a power for redemption, which is still as efficacious as in the days of old. This is the great gift of the mission-field to the Church at home. A new chain of evidence has been forged on behalf of the Christian Faith; and while the theory of religion has been undergoing these manifold attacks at home, the conquests of the Cross have been repeated among the "Greeks and Barbarians, the wise and unwise" of all nations. And thus we are laid under fresh obligations to carry the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth, because our own faith in the scope and power and universality of our precious religion has been profoundly increased and enriched. There is, indeed, no final answer to the sceptic except a regenerated life, and there is no argument so potent as a soul redeemed. And when the student of comparative religion says Christianity is only one among many world-religions, and that we

have no right to interfere with the hold or place of other religions on those who hold them as true, our answer is now ready as never before in Christian history. We say it is THE world religion, because it has been proved capable of carrying a message of salvation to men of every colour and creed, every caste and clan, the wide world over ; and it is the only religion of which this is true. Shall not this strengthen our own faith in it ? Do we not owe something to those heathen lands—north, south, east, and west—which have contributed their quota of witnesses to the abiding power of our holy religion to mankind as a whole? Is there not in this interflow of benefit a claim on us to persevere in the good work, and to carry it on to perfection ? Are we not also "debtors to the Greeks and the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise"? And shall we not pay it, at peril of losing the most precious of all our spiritual possessions—our own faith and confidence in the universal Saviour?

XIII

THE WORK WITH A DREAM AT ITS HEART

"Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame."—HEB. XII. 2.

"See, saith He, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the Mount."—HEB. VIII. 5.

THESE words were suggested to me in reading a story by one of our noblest living writers. We are introduced to a man who was proposing to himself a political career, in whom the ruling motive was personal ambition, and he was talking about it to the woman whom he was about to marry. She was an idealist, who wished to rouse him to a higher purpose than he had as yet cherished, but who found it hard to do so, for he was of the earth, earthy. In the course of their conversation she uttered these high and memorable words: "It seems to me that no work in this world is really worth doing except the work which has a great dream at its heart." Instantly the words I have taken as one of my texts came to my mind. Jesus did a great—the greatest—work ever done in this world, and He was able to do it because there was a great dream at its heart. The work He came to do was to redeem the world from its pettiness and its sin; and the dream which He had, and which kept Him true and faithful to it, even though He died in order to attain it, was the

bright vision of that world when it was redeemed. "Who endured the Cross"—that was the work—"for the joy that was set before Him"—that was the dream; and because of the dream He was able to do the work thoroughly and for ever. If there had been no dream to sustain Him in His sorrow and suffering, He could not have borne it, the burden would have been intolerable even to Him; but because of the dream He "endured" to the end, and was able to trample down the very shame of the Cross as a thing of no account.

My subject, then, is Dreaming and Working, and how the two are related to one another in a true life.

I

You can divide life into these two experiences—dreaming and working.

To dream—that is, to picture to ourselves great ends, and imagine ourselves accomplishing them, and what we shall be when they are accomplished. It is an act of the religious imagination. It is a cloud-picture of an ideal world, of the world we would shape into a reality. We see things as they are—that is the prose of life, which is often a thing of thorns and briars, of sharp precipices, and mountainous difficulties, of intractable materials; then we see things as we wish to make them—that is the poetry of life, when all is as we desire it to be, harmonious and beautiful.

And to work—that is, to take the prose of life, its hardships, its unyielding difficulties, its stubborn facts, and try to mould them into agreement with our world of vision, our dream-world. This is to bring the forces of our will to bear on crude realities as

they are, and to transform them into the finer realities which we wish them to be. Thus, dreaming and working is what makes up life for all right-minded men and women. Some men, it is true, are little more than dreamers. They are rich in ideals, but they are poor in practice; they dream great things, but they never do them. And many men are only workers. They do their duty, they follow their occupation, they toil hard from one day to another, and from one year's end to another, but they have no vision to gladden or inspire them, no "pattern in the Mount" to gaze at, no "joy that is set before" them to lift their hearts above monotony, and to make them rejoice in their work. Those who do nothing but dream go through life without accomplishing anything; those who do nothing but work go through life without enjoying anything. Only the dreamers who work are the true dreamers, and only the workers who dream are the real workers. In a true man's life some dream transfigures all his work, and the work dignifies every dream by giving substance to it. Without a dream at its heart all work becomes drudgery; without the work to make it effectual, every dream remains unsubstantial and empty. When the two are married and become one, then is life noble, and glad, and strong. For it is the dream element in life that makes it glad; it is the work element in it that makes it strong; and "the joy of the Lord shall be your strength." To master the art whereby we transform our actual world into our ideal world, this is the highest function of human life. It is a hard, strenuous, difficult business, but it is the only business worth attempting in a world like this—the only way of transforming the prosy commonplace of mere existence, which is all

that life means for many people, into the poetry of a life of rich experience and high endeavour. To dream nobly and well, that is the first thing in the equipment of a real man; to work hard to realise the dream, that is the second, and still more important.

But there are dreams and dreams. Some of you may perchance have read Lucian's phantasy which he calls the "Island of Dreams." "This island," he tells us, "is covered by a forest of poppies and mandragora, and full of owls and bats, the only birds to be found there. In the midst is a river that flows only by night. The walls of the city are lofty, their colours various and changeful as those of the rainbow. There are four gates: one of iron and another of earth, by which frightful and melancholy dreams make their exit; the others of horn and of ivory, through which beautiful dreams wend their way. Sleep is king of the island, and Night is its divinity. The inhabitants are dreams, of which the forms are dissimilar. Some are well-favoured and of captivating appearance, others are misshapen and hideous. The former are richly clad in purple and gold, as monarchs on the stage; the latter are miserably poor and apparelled in rags."

These, however, you will say, are dreams of the night. But it is true also of the day-dreams with which I am dealing in this sermon, and in which we all more or less indulge. Not all of them, as you well know, are "well-favoured and of captivating appearance." There are day-dreams of evil as well as good in the human heart: impure, lascivious dreams, which, if realised, would make men into beasts; dreams of self-seeking, which would make life a mere quest for pleasure, or wealth,

or irresponsible power; dreams of ambition and vain-glory, which would bend everything into the service of that worst of all tyrants—the ignoble self which we all carry within us. And I need not tell you that there are dreams pure as the angels of God, radiant as the morning, crowned with God's own honour and majesty; such dreams as, if realised, would make life a pilgrimage after high ends, and transfigure it to its farthest earthly limit and right into the Beyond, into a pilgrimage after an inaccessible but ever-ennobling ideal. That is the kind of life we are meant to live here on earth, whose programme is given us in the words, "See thou make everything according to the pattern shown thee in the Mount," and whose perfect accomplishment was found only in Him who, "for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame."

II

Youth is often spoken of as the proper season for dreams, and mature life for accomplishment.

This is so far true that, if men do not begin life under the inspiration of a great dream, they will never do any work worth doing. If a man does not face his life's-calling with a great dream in his heart, he will never be more than "a hewer of wood and a drawer of water"—a pedestrian soul without wings. And he will do little if the dream is not of such intensity and glow and power as to be a constant inspiration and solace to him as he faces the unavoidable prose and difficulty of actual experience. The maiden who does not enter married life with a cradle-dream in her soul will never make a true wife, for she will never make a true mother. The young man who does not enter his profession with the right

kind of dream in facing it will never do aught in it worth attaining. Every lawful occupation has its ideal aspect and its ignoble aspect. You can draw your dreams from either side. Are you going to be a doctor? If you think only of fees, and success, and a vision of Harley Street, with a stream of carriages outside to help you through the drudgery of your studies, you may reach your ambition, but you will never be one of the world's "good physicians." The young doctor's dream must be of the noble mission of lessening suffering, of curing or of preventing disease, of starting a new generation in possession of that glorious heritage of good health—a sound mind in a sound body—which would make the world a joyful, efficient, and progressive world. Are you going to be a banker, or a tradesman, or a merchant? You can dream of making money, and so remain an inhabitant of Grub Street all your life; or you can dream of being a link in the great chain of economic benefit, a centre of just and holy dealings, a purveyor of honourable bargains between the man who makes materials or goods and the man who needs them; and if you will only do these things on a standard of open and honest dealing, whether with customer or employé or public at large, you may not make a fortune, but you will be one of God's guild of honourable merchants or tradesmen, and you will make your calling a blessing to all with whom you have to deal. Are you going to plead in the courts, or preach in a pulpit, or write articles in a newspaper, or remain a humble employé all your life? There is still the alternative of looking at your calling from a high point of view or an ignoble point of view, and according to whether you will do the one or the other you will elevate your calling by the holy dream

at its heart, or lower its standards into the dust, debase its duties into drudgeries, and ruin it as a channel of social benefit. It is only a high dream at the heart of all work that can keep that work clean and sacred. Without it, it becomes not a doing but an undoing, a debasement to the soul that follows it, and a peril and injustice to those who should benefit by it.

III

But it is not enough to start our life-work with a dream. The dream must be kept warm and vital in the very heart of our work all through life, if our work is to be well done.

We hear much of the disillusionments of life as we grow older. Dreams tend to fade as we come into rough contact with the hard realities of the world. They are by nature very sensitive, tender, friable, easily soiled with dust and mud, and so far too readily surrendered in view of the difficulty of realising them. Many a man, if he gave you his heart's confidence, would tell you: "No one could have started life with finer visions than I had. I was going to do wonderful things when I started. My standard of honour was high, my aim was for nothing short of the ideal thing, my heart was in the empyrean. But I soon found that I was after the impossible, and that such dreams don't materialise in this work-a-day world; and so, gradually, I came to see that worldly wisdom was more profitable than high-faluting notions—then I began to be successful, and here I am." So the enthusiast becomes in middle life a cynic; the reformer degenerates into a pessimist; the pilgrim after the ideal ends, with being a satirist of all high endeavour, as was the

preacher of old. "I have seen an end of all perfection"—that is one of the saddest and bitterest sentences in all literature.

This is not only true of the gifted and the ambitious, but of men and women in the ordinary ways and relations of life. How often, for instance, is the common pathway of married life strewn with the dead blossoms of courtship! What dreams lovers have of married bliss! Was ever a man who did not think of his bride as the sweetest woman out of Eden? Was ever a maid who did not think that she was going to marry the only superman yet born? Such is what is called the "illusion" of love—Nature's *camouflage* for concealing the prose and commonness of real life! And then in many cases comes the so-called awakening—the discovery that the angel of courtship is only the ordinary woman of the household, with a temper of her own, and all the instabilities of her sex to contend with; that the lover is merely a husband who soon forgets the caress in the snub, and is so absorbed in his business that he has no longer leisure or inclination for the tender attentions of his courting days. And so farewell to married happiness!

Now, one of the supreme duties of life is to safeguard and hold on to its dreams—*i.e.*, to maintain a firm relation between its ideals and its duties. How are we to do this?

1. The first and best way is to remember that the ideal is alone the real. It was Plato who first preached with any effect the doctrine — that the so-called world of fact is really an illusion, and that the world of the ideal is alone real. But it was Jesus who first turned this into a practical doctrine. His dream of the kingdom of God as the only abiding-place of spiritual reality, and this life

as so much call and opportunity to establish that reality in a world of make-believe and unreality, is the one hope of humanity on its upward path. Lose that, and you lose everything; the taproot of progress withers in society, the instinct of growth and happiness disappears from the personal life. Keep a firm hold of that, and both principles of true living are safeguarded.

2. We must remember that the ideal can shape the actual into its own likeness. For instance, to go back to the home—the centre (or the grave) of human well-being. What if, after all, the woman as she appears to the lover is the real woman, and the man as the affianced maiden dreams him to be the real man? And what if both be so convinced of this that each will in married life honestly attempt to materialise the other's dream? What if every bride vows that she will not disappoint the man she marries, but be to him the kind of wife he thinks she is going to be? And what if the man vows that as husband he will be such a man to his wife that she will retain her faith and love for him till both are old and decrepit, so that they will be able to look at each other with the same undying affection and faith till the end? Then married happiness will not fade with the honeymoon, but through all life's strains and stresses each will know that the other has been trying to become what they vowed they would be at God's Altar when they were joined in holy wedlock.

So I might go on through all life's relations and life's work. No duty is more imperative than to keep our early dreams alive and warm and strive to the end to make them real. It is not given us to fully realise any of our dreams, but we can be true

to them, we can plod on after them, we can cherish them and keep them warm in the heart of all our work to the very end. Life, of course, is full of unavoidable disappointments. We do form impossible expectations of what life can give us, whether of love or of success in high things, or of what we have a right to expect from others. Even in our religious plans and efforts, while we can shape great dreams and have the holiest visions, it is not given us to attain to more than a fraction of our aims in this most difficult and intractable world. The only chance, however, to reach the possible is to keep our faith in the impossible or, if you prefer it, in the supreme and the divine, knowing that what is impossible to us is possible in His own good time to God. Jesus had this faith in its fulness. In the darker hour of His ministry, when He had come to realise that His fellow-countrymen were finally leaving Him, and the Cross sternly confronted Him with its rugged arms, He turned round to the dwindling company of His disciples, and fastening His glorious eyes upon them in that impressive way of His, said: "Fear not little flock: it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." The light will dawn on the darkest night; the day will come though long delayed; we shall reap if we faint not; He will not turn back till He have put all enemies under His footstool. That is the note that rings perpetually throughout the New Testament—that text-book of hope out of blackest despair, of joy in profoundest sorrow, of victory out of every seeming defeat.

Brethren, it is just now our pre-eminent duty to keep the dream-side of our religious work alive in the midst of our work, and for the sake of our work.

It is full of difficulties and discouragements, of repeated and heavy disappointments. Without some spiritual make-weight to these elements of exhaustion and failure we should not long continue in fruitful effort. Just now the facts and forces are all against us. Take the world as it actually is, and it would seem as though all the fair visions of the past were scattered like blossoms in a raging storm. "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind." Civilisation lies in ruins around us. The splendid outlooks and prospects of the nineteenth century are smothered in blood and mud. Our churches are half-deserted, the current of worldliness, of materialism, of secularity, flows strongly past our doors ; there is scarcely a ray of light to cheer us in the darkened sky. *Sursum corda!* Lift up your hearts—the end is not yet! Let us fall back on the great dreams of our faith. The future belongs to Christ, though the present is in the tyranny of the devil. God cannot fail : righteousness must come forth sooner or later into judgment. And just at this moment, when the clouds of war have blotted out the sky, and we are passing as a nation through a Gethsemane of sorrow, with a still greater Calvary of suffering possibly before us, let us follow the Saviour's example, and think of the joy that is set before us in the victory of freedom and the renewal of all that makes for progress, and in the glow of that joy let us "endure" our "cross, despising the shame." For—

> "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
> Doth his successive journeys run ;
> His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
> Till moons shall wax and wane no more."

XIV

THE NATURAL AND THE SPIRITUAL

"Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.—1 Cor. xv. 46.

Paul died long before the word "evolution" was coined or the idea conceived; but here he avows himself the first Christian evolutionist. In these words he puts into a sentence the Christian philosophy of the universe and of man. "First that which is natural, then that which is spiritual"—here, as in a nutshell, you have the seed which has taken so long to germinate, but which is destined to gather up every human science and philosophy into one beautiful organic whole. I find here (1) the summary of all that science and history has to teach us; (2) a point of view from which life falls into its true perspective; (3) the goal to which all God's Providence and man's ideals alike tend; (4) the key to every problem of reform and progress that oppresses and puzzles men nowadays.

I

It need not take us long to illustrate the first point. I have mentioned that here we have the epitome of the history of the planet and of man. "First that which is natural, afterward that which is spiritual."

If we could unroll the folded leaves of Time, we should see how true this is of the process which is

called physical evolution. Mr. H. G. Wells in his story, "The Time Machine," gives us an imaginary picture of the illimitable ages of the past in a rapid survey. He dreamt that by touching a lever in this machine he was able to make Time go backward, so that he could recapitulate the course of the world's history from the beginning. What he really saw was the probable line of development as scientific men have slowly built it up by reading the records of the rocks and of the stars. You have the same outline on a grander scale in the first chapter of the Bible. The formless void; the birth of light on the welter of chaos; the separation of material elements into sun and planets, sky and earth, sea and land, day and night; the birth of life, vegetable and animal; the slow appearance of the organic world as we know it in an ever-ascending series of complexity and efficiency; the beginning of brain and so of mind; and at last man, an earthly creature, who was also a living spirit.

Yes, the spiritual is built upon the natural, and could not come to itself as we know it without the natural, out of which it grows. Food must be there before digestion can begin; lips and tongue must come before speech and song; the canvas must be prepared before you can paint your picture; the candle must be lit before its flame can burn; the brain must be fashioned ere the mind can think; the body of man must be prepared before the soul can realise itself within it.

And then St. Paul here makes a further distinction. Man's life is twofold. There is a lower and a higher in him too, as there is in the universe outside him. There is the natural man, the man who sees and feels, enjoys pleasure, suffers pain, follows his own will, realises himself as part of the earthly organic order.

And there is the spiritual man, the "man from heaven," who has a sense of right and wrong, who can see an ideal and pursue it, who blossoms out of the natural order into the region of goodness, of holiness, and of God. Here, too, the natural is first; the spiritual follows after. Adam comes before Christ. "The man of the garden," as Phillips Brooks has it, "untrained, undisciplined, self-indulgent, incapable of self-control, comes before the Man of the Cross, who willingly surrenders the present for the future, the body for the soul, and Himself for others. The earthly life comes before the heavenly; the life of temptation and resistance and surrender before the life of spontaneity and freedom and attainment." "First that which is natural, afterward that which is spiritual."

Before I pass on, I wish to point out how this order of things explains a mystery which often troubles us—and that is why the natural is so strong and the spiritual is so weak in us. It is because the natural man came first. He was long in possession of the field before the other appeared on the scene, and he had intrenched himself in the strength of his passions and the lordly power of his appetites. It is the law of life that its beginnings are inconceivably faint and weak, and that it comes to itself through struggle and pain and partial failure. And that is how the spiritual life has come. When we lament how uncongenial a home the spiritual finds in our own hearts, can we wonder, when we consider how incipient it is, and how all the might of hereditary tendencies fights it every inch of the way, so that it has even yet scarcely taken firm root in most men? How faint and feeble must have been its first strivings in those men of the far-off days who first began to feel its trembling flame awakening into

a glow in their half-bestial lives? The wonder is, not that it is so feeble still, but that it was not crushed out of being long, long ago; that man did not fall back into a contented animal instead of slowly finding the life of the spirit permeating the life of the flesh, till with the coming of the Son of God—the Second Adam, the Man from Heaven—it was for the first time in full possession of the field! It took untold millenniums to produce a Christ; it may well take as many more to bring humanity as a whole unto the stature of the fulness of Christ. But the movement has begun, and it will not end till He shall see of the travail of His soul and is satisfied.

II

Let us pass on to my next point. What are the right relations of these two men in us—the natural and the spiritual? According to St. Paul, the natural exists for the spiritual; the spiritual crowns and finds his opportunity in the conquest of the natural.

1. *The Natural exists for the Spiritual.*—Judging by the way in which the natural man resists and rebels against the spiritual, this is not at all self-evident. "The natural man," says the Apostle, "receiveth not the things of the spirit." The coming of the spiritual heralds a state of war, not of welcome. Its demands are resisted, its authority is spurned. "For I know that in me—*i.e.*, in my flesh—dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not." And the reason is this: "For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin." And so the spiritual can take possession and come to its own only by conquest.

In our modern speech this may be put thus: The term "natural" man is ambiguous. It means, first, the animal nature illumined by self-conscious mind. If this were all, there would be no ostensible reason why the spiritual man should not take possession of the natural just as the seed does the unresisting soil, and realise himself by assimilation. But the natural man is not pure nature; something (according to the Bible account of his nature) has happened to him: an anti-spiritual element is already in possession of the field; he is under the dominance of evil, of sin; he is a fallen creature. Call it what you will, something has gone wrong, and needs to be put right. And this it is that accounts for the conflict which is at once the shame and the glory of the inner life of all of us. "When I would do good, then is evil present with me"; "to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not."

None the less is the natural man meant for the uses of the spiritual man. We are made, not for evil, but for good; not for sin, but for righteousness; not for self-indulgence—which leads to ruin—but for self-conquest—which leads to fuller life. What is wrong is alien to us, a something not meant to be, and which being must be conquered and slain; we must die to the life of sin that we may live the life of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. No man comes to himself till the natural elements in him have been redeemed and made the willing servant and slave of the spiritual.

2. Or put it in another way, the *Spiritual finds its opportunity by the conquest of the Natural.*

The old theology, which in endeavouring to exalt the spiritual threw contempt and contumely on the natural life, sinned against the God who made the

natural as well as the spiritual. It is only the natural as degraded by sin that we should denounce. The materials of the spiritual life are all found in the natural order. It is sin which has spoiled nature, which is alone wrong, and by conquering sin the soul redeems the lower nature to its true uses and place in the universe.

For what is this natural man of whom theologians often speak so disparagingly?

It is the physical passions, and aptitudes, and emotions, the power to think, to feel, to act, to purpose, to accomplish. It is that in us which enables us to enjoy food, light, music, the companionships and attachments of this earthly social order. It is the faculties by which alone the spiritual can realise itself in this world of sense and time. Without the spiritual to uplift and use it, the natural man is an unfinished product, an organ without a musician, a body without a soul. Without the natural, the spiritual man is a mere empty possibility, a promise unfulfilled—nay, a creature gone astray.

Two mistakes have been made in the relation of the natural and the spiritual which have had disastrous effects in the world's history. There is the mistake of the carnal man, who pooh-poohs religion, and thinks it a weak and silly thing. He believes in letting the natural man have his way; he indulges his passions, lives for pleasure, thinks he is in this world to have what he calls "a good time," which generally means a bad time for someone else. To this man the spiritual order is a foolishness, a thing to mock at or to neglect; and his punishment is that he becomes incapable of entering into any high conception even of the natural life, and altogether to miss the possibilities of the spiritual life. Sometimes

it leads to tragic ruin of body as well as soul, but always to a life cramped, selfish, reckless, miserable.

On the other hand there is the mistake of the religious man, who thinks that the only way to subdue the "natural man" is to override and ignore him. It is here that the ascetic goes wrong, and all those who do violence to the body and its needs, thinking that so they honour the soul. People who retire into solitude, thinking that this is the only way to avoid the solicitations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, forget that so long as they take the body with them they can never escape from the natural man, and if violence is done to his rights he will have his revenge by breaking out in some new way. This is why monasteries and nunneries have at times been hotbeds of vice ; this is why they are felt by healthy-minded people to be morbid in their influence on the individual and the community. But there is a Protestant asceticism which is equally wrong. The Puritans were simply monks turned inside out, in that they denounced all forms of innocent joy, and confounded the pleasant with the sinful. They, too, were punished for their attempt to reform society by force by seeing the country rush after the Restoration into extravagances of licentious living, and by finding in their own hearts a gloomy and bitter inner life. It is not by crushing either body or soul that the true life can be attained. It is by giving each its rightful place in the complex life. The right place for the spiritual man is to be the inspirer as well as ruler of the natural man, and the right place for the natural man is to be the willing instrument and obedient servant of the spiritual. For there is no part of the natural man which cannot be spiritualised. Let the new life be born in us, and the things which

beforehand are the very opportunities of sin become the means of holiness. The sex instinct blossoms into the Christian home; the love of pleasure is clarified of grossness and lifted into an atmosphere of purity and true joy; the passion for power becomes a yearning for holy influence; selfishness rises into the pursuit of lofty personal ideals; the very passions become wings with which to rise into the regions of a true delight in God. Cleanse the heart of sin, and the whole man becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit, and "all things are ours" in a higher and truer sense than the worldly man knows anything of.

III

There is one more application of this truth—"first that which is natural, afterwards that which is spiritual"—that I must touch on.

In society as well as in the individual there is the sphere of the natural and the sphere of the spiritual; and there is a social salvation as well as a spiritual. How, then, is society to be reformed? And how are people who live in human society to be reformed? Here again there are two ideals and two methods.

There is the way of the religious enthusiast, who says you can only reform society by regenerating every individual in it. There is a great truth here, but in its bare form it leads to what may be called a deadly error. If you follow it out literally to the neglect of the social factor, you will never get beyond a certain point in the reformation and cleansing and sweetening of society. As a matter of fact, this doctrine has been preached in this country ever since the Reformation; since that time we might almost say it has been in possession of the field. And what

has been the result? The result has been a succession of splendid Christian men and women in English society who have been the salt of the nation, who have kept the land from hopeless corruption from generation to generation. They have been earnest, pure, Christ-like, loving, and full of passion for the salvation of men. But they have not succeeded in Christianising society; they have not purified it from its foul vices and its social abuses; they have failed to keep our cities from being overcrowded and the poor from being oppressed; they have not succeeded in bringing the new Jerusalem down from heaven and planting it beside the Thames and the Mersey. This Christian country is still a good place to sin in, but a difficult place to repent in; and many a man who means well is early dragged down to ruin because the social temptations around him are too many and strong for his power of resistance. This ideal, I take it, at least in isolation, has had its day. The spiritual cannot save men by ignoring or suppressing the natural in society any more than in the individual.

Then, again, there is the opposite ideal—the ideal of the social reformer pure and simple, whose motto is that men are all right if only you can make their social conditions all right. This is the creed of the anarchist, who identifies the principle of evil with human government; of the socialist, who says "redistribute the world's wealth, and you will ensure the millennium"; and in a less crude form it is the creed of the man who thinks he can bring reform in by some pet form of remedial legislation. But this, too, will not work by itself. Every ideal community that was ever formed from Eden down to Brook Farm has failed, and for the same reason—that

without renewing the individual members of society you can never for long have a renewed society. Old evils will reappear under another form, new evils will come to light, and the ancient poison which is at work in the veins of the natural man will break out into fresh social diseases that will baffle preacher and statesman as before.

The time has come for the Christian Church to rise to the full scheme of human redemption by attacking the evil from both sides at once. It is not of much use trying to lift men up in our slums and over-crowded centres by preaching to them and doing nothing else. It is not much good getting drunkards to sign the pledge and giving them no place to spend their evenings except the comfortable, well-lighted public-house. It is not much good reforming the wastrels of our streets, and then shutting the door of every respectable living to them. For the vast proportion of these victims of poverty and vice are too weak to stand alone; they need mothering and supporting before they can walk or run by themselves. For this reason I believe in the "Institutional Churches" which are springing up all over the land: more, we are ourselves trying the method at Whitefields just now, and I trust you will all persevere in the experiment to the uttermost. Let me, however, say this as I close—that the centre, (though not the circumference) of all social reform is the reform of the individual; that all upward movements are spiritual movements, and that the preaching and the practice of the Gospel is the real converting agency in the individual and in the nation. Let us have clubs, and let us have prayer-meetings: but if the club is to push the prayer-meeting into the background, club as well as prayer-meeting will

ere long come to an end. First the natural, but first only to lead to a better first—the spiritual. The Christ who healed men's bodies was the Christ who saved men's souls ; and unless the healing of the body leads to the saving of the soul, it will avail us nothing in the end.

In the larger Church life before you in this place, and in your efforts for all whom you can reach through Church and mission, let this be kept in mind. So will God prosper the work of your hands, and bless it abundantly.

XV

ON PROPORTION OF LIFE

"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith."—Rom. xii. 6.

The immediate application of these words is to the use of the charismata, or spiritual gifts, bestowed on the various members of the primitive Church, and to the importance of manifesting them in due measure and balance. Every man, says the Apostle (in effect), who has a religious gift of any kind must exercise it with a proper regard to its character, amount, intensity, and practical value to others. He must not be puffed up by it, as though the gifts of others were of no account compared with his own, but, in a modest spirit, give others the benefit of it; and, in a diligent spirit, develop it up to its limits; and, in a consecrated spirit, devote it to the service of "the good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God."

I wish to take this principle of proportion and due measure, and apply it to life in general. You will find it to be a very favourite idea of St. Paul. One-sidedness and disproportion are among the things he denounces most frequently. His ideal of a Christian Church is governed more by the principle of proportion than any other—save that of love. The various members are to take their place in the community according to their gifts and powers of service; no

one is to be self-assertive, or to push himself into undue prominence, or to interfere with the opportunity of others to do their part ; but each is to tell in due proportion to his worth and ability to serve the rest. It is clear from his Epistles that the earliest Churches were filled with a restless and turbulent life ; they were full of self-assertive people, who carried into their religion the ungoverned impulses of their unregenerate days, and there was consequently a good deal of disorder and bickering. Several of St. Paul's letters, notably those to the Corinthians, were written to correct this tendency ; and he took great pains to bring his converts to see that there could be no happy spiritual fellowship till this turbulence was reduced, and the company of believers became a balanced, ordered, and mutually helpful society.

And it is equally clear that St. Paul believed strongly in the same principle of balance in the individual life. His conception of a Christian man was of a character that was rich, active, and many-sided, full of life—positive, progressive, and eager ; but at the same time a life held in leash by a spirit of firm self-control and a commanding sense of fitness in all things. We shall find proof of this if we read from the ninth to the eighteenth verse of this chapter. What a galaxy of noble qualities are here ! Strength and gentleness, energy and quietude of heart, sternness and sympathy, diligence and thought for others, practicality and idealism, business aptitude and piety, a spirit of humour and joy struggling with a due regard for the sorrows and sadness of life, uncompromising fidelity to principle, combined with a large tolerant charity, and a fine spirit of magnanimity. The man who can combine these qualities in thorough proportion in his own life is almost a perfect man ;

that is the kind of men and women he would have all Christians be, and that is the kind of men and women we all ought to be.

Let us see how this principle works out, first, as regards the qualities that make up our ideal of character; and, secondly, as regards the rule of practical conduct.

I

The Christian ideal of character, as I have said, includes the principle of proportion. It is not enough that we should be right men and women, but as life is a growth, there must be a fair and beautiful balance in our development Christward. We are to reach out, not in the direction of one virtue only, or of a few, but of all; we are to "grow up unto Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ."

1. It would be well, perhaps, to point out that this does not mean that we are to aim at uniformity in character. It is always a mischievous thing when a single type of religious character dominates a community. That was the fault of Puritanism, which in its later manifestations coerced its votaries into a solemn, rigid, sour uniformity of behaviour. And that is the fault of the pietistic type, which would cut off half the natural human qualities and develop the rest into a kind of hothouse growth. These sectional ideals are destructive of the free life of the spirit; they ignore the infinite diversity of human nature; they put the soul into a kind of strait jacket; they kill all spontaneity and enterprise in the religious life. No! the proportion of the faith does not mean identity of character.

We are all intended to be different in the outlines and in the content of our individuality, and yet to

preserve a sense of proportion. And, thank God! that is quite possible. There are many types of architecture—for instance, the Assyrian, the Egyptian, the Doric, the Gothic, the Moorish, the Indian, and there are laws of proportion that govern them all. "There is one glory of the sun and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory." The beauty of a rose is very different from the beauty of a tree, yet each may be framed according to the exquisite laws of its own balanced being. And so we are to gain and to maintain our separate individual type of excellence in the religious life. Your excellence is not mine, and mine cannot be yours, yet we may both reach out to a beautiful proportion in moral character.

2. Nor are we to imagine that such proportion need interfere with the utmost development of our special gifts. Paul delighted in any individuality of endowment in his converts, and he encouraged them to cultivate this to its limit. That is part of his purpose in this chapter.

Read verses 4-8;—as though he had said: "Do not attempt to dragoon your chief excellencies to a conventional model. If you have a gift, use it—use it well, in accordance with its particular quality and measure; it has been given you to use, and that to the very utmost of its value. For what you have, others lack, what you lack, they may have; and by sharing your spiritual gifts you can share gracious benefits with one another and fill up the vacant places in each other's lives, so that the life of each becomes the life of all, and all may share in the life of each."

3. We must not, however—and here we find the completing thought in this argument—be satisfied

with having mere individual excellencies. Our own life, as well as the life of the community, is meant to be a full life, an overflowing life, a satisfying life. Therefore, while we should take care of our excellencies to complete them, we must take care also of our defects to correct them. Build up the weak or vacant places in your character; discipline your faults. If there is anything lacking in your disposition, see that your endeavour be to supply it. Are you strong in imagination, but weak in will? Are you full of zeal, but tend to grow soon discouraged? Are you warm in your sympathies, but lacking in persistence? Are you cheerful in disposition, but quick of temper? Take care of these weak places, and do all you can to strengthen them. Water the drooping plants of your soul's garden with your prayers and your tears, and strive eagerly to bring forward the lagging qualities of a full, round, Christian character till you are in the way of reaching something like a proportionate equipment.

The tendency of this age is towards specialism in every department. Life is so full and so complex that there is "not enough for this and that"; we must concentrate, we say, on one thing, and do that well. That is good within limits, but it has another side to it. This is the reason why we have so many schools of thought. This is why we divide up so much into parties in State and Church. This is why we have so much onesidedness of judgment on all subjects. Men tend to isolate themselves from the broad stream of human life and linger in backwaters while the great tide moves on. However inevitable this may be in some directions, let us not submit to this tyranny of specialism in religion. Let us aim at being full men and women, having sympathies

that follow the daylight round the globe ; having thoughts that ripen with the process of the suns ; having a mind open to all God's truth whencesoever it may come ; having a soul with windows open north, south, east, and west, so that we may be accessible to every wind of God's Spirit, and be stimulated by every fragrant breath of Divine influence. Let us pray that we may not become narrower, more cramped, less sensitive to all that is fair and true and good, as we grow older, for that is the general danger, but rather that we may retain the freshness of youth with the experience of years, and grow in intensity and breadth and fulness of life to the end.

This should also be our endeavour in our religious thinking. We break up too readily into classes and coteries of thought in theology. The critical mind too often lacks piety, the pious too readily fails in virility and force. The practical Christian neglects his devotional duties, the dreamy enthusiast lacks the business instinct. It is the purpose of the athlete in his training to develop not this muscle and that, but all in due balance. Why should we not exercise ourselves to an all-round godliness, "that mind and heart, according well, may make one music." And preachers, seeing they have to feed the whole flock of God, should see to it that in their teaching they compass the whole round of Christian truth, so that each hearer may have "his meat in due season." Only thus "will they rightly divide the word of truth."

II

And now let me pass to the second, and in a sense more difficult, part of my subject—the need for

applying the principle of proportion in practical conduct.

What I mean is this—that the value and beauty of our life, and much of its happiness and charm, depend on a due sense of balance in what we say and do, in our feelings and sentiments, in our aims and efforts.

Many people try to act bluntly on the principle that a thing is either absolutely right or wrong, that there is no middle course. Of certain things this is broadly true. Truth is truth, love is love, good intention is good intention, a kind deed is a kind deed, a lie is a lie, and so on, all the world over, always, ever and without exception.

But, now, consider. How seldom do we come to that narrow place where there is only room to go on or turn back? Life is not only a matter of this or that, but of one thing out of many things, of less or more, of circumstances that affect the issue and make it different, of infinite shades and degrees and measures, and all these things have to be taken into consideration in determining most questions of conduct, good or bad. It is a problem, once more, in proportion.

For instance, take the question of speaking the truth. We must always do this, we say; and of course that is right. But have you ever considered that, whereas truth and falsehood are as opposed as light and darkness, in practical life the one shades into the other often as gradually as day passes into twilight and twilight into night? A look, a gesture, a smile, a sneer, will often change a truth into a falsehood by the way it is spoken. Or—how much of the truth am I to tell my friend? It is something that affects other people as well, let us

say, and if I tell him too much I may do mischief to a third party; if I tell him too little, I leave the way open to a serious misunderstanding. Even in so clear and rigid a thing as truth-speaking there is thus room for less or more, and that in the interests of truth itself.

How much more is this so in those cases where there is no vital principle at stake, but where it all depends on adapting means to ends, on mood, temper, sentiment, relationships, and so on! I think I may boldly say that nine-tenths of life depends on doing things in their due measure. The old Greek maxim, μηδὲν ἄγαν, "nothing too much, nothing too little!" is one of the wisest contributions to practical philosophy.

Take family government. What is the right limit of authority in training children? They have to be disciplined, and trained, and made obedient. At one time it was considered to be almost the whole duty of parents to see that their children grew up obedient to parental authority. The result was that many children, when they did grow up, took the first opportunity of throwing off all authority. Nowadays, especially, we are told, in America, an undue indulgence has crept into family government, and children are allowed to do very much as they like, and to grow up just as they please. Both these extremes are wrong, and the remedy lies in a due balance of the principles of liberty and discipline, so that while the habit of loyal obedience is thoroughly engrained, children are at the same time taught to prepare for the time when, away from the guidance of the home, they will have to govern themselves by the inner law of conscience, or make a wreck of their lives.

Take the very practical question of how Christians should spend the Lord's Day. The old Puritan idea of a Sunday devoted to nothing but solemn religious exercises, the one gloomy day of the week, in which no one did what he wanted to do, but only what he was supposed he ought to do, is dead and buried. But have you solved this question satisfactorily, you who gibe at that old-fashioned ideal of one whole day in seven for worship and spiritual exercises? What are the limits of your reading on Sundays? What are the customary topics of conversation in the home? Does not the habit of going to service once a day tend to degenerate into going occasionally? I notice that when those who usually only come to service in the morning are hindered by the weather, they seldom if ever come at night to make up for that inability. Does not this suggest a real slackening in your religious interest and enthusiasm? Is there not a right principle of measure and proportion wanted here?

Once more, take the question of amusements. What is the right place for this element in a Christian life? It is again a matter of less or more, of proportion. If men recognised this, no one would doubt the value of relaxation, and the brightening effect of concerts and dramatic art and pleasant games, and all that goes to lighten the burden and care of life. The reason why pleasure is dangerous is not because it is wrong, but because it is so difficult, especially for frail young natures, to indulge in it in due measure, and so easy to fall into extravagance and self-indulgence. The rein has to be drawn tight in order to keep most of us within due bounds. But when that is done we are benefited and braced and built up by pleasure as by an invigorating tonic,

and made fit for the serious duties of life. As it is, the pleasures of good fellowship, sports and pastimes, the drama, etc., are all open doors through which weak and unwary souls fall into wretchedness, misery, and manifold temptations which destroy the soul.

I might go on illustrating this same principle, but enough has, I trust, been said to set you to considering your ways. Let us pray that God may enable us, both in character and in conduct, to keep the happy mean in all those directions where life opens out possibilities of too much or too little. The way is narrow, but it is good ; it is difficult, but it leads to a great reward. We are here to grow into a full-grown or perfect man—such was Jesus our Lord. How balanced, how poised, how proportionate, was His beautiful and glorious nature ! How wonderful the unity in which He binds up the opposites of human character—strength and gentleness, firm resolve and kindly concession, unbending persistence and most loving sympathy—the one perfect Man the world has ever seen. We cannot be what He was, but we can put ourselves in His hand, that He may do with us what He will. Then by His grace we shall some day become like Him, " for we shall see Him as He is."

XVI

THE GIFT AND ITS RETURN

"There is no man that hath left . . . for My sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive a hundredfold. . . ."—MARK x. 29, 30.

THIS is one of those paradoxes or contradictory sayings of our Lord that half-conceal and half-reveal a very great and precious truth. I must ask you to take for granted any exposition of this very familiar passage, because you all know so well the occasion when these words were uttered, and because I have so much to say to you on the text itself.

Of course, we cannot accept these words in their bald and literal meaning. If a man gives up his family, his wealth, his position, for the sake of Christ and God—let us say into exile, or prison, or death, as a witness or martyr of the Gospel—he cannot literally receive all these back again, for that would be physically impossible. You cannot renew a life that is over, or relationships that are actually severed and done with in this life. But it was our Lord's manner to make use of startling, even impossible, expressions, that He might make a lodgment for great truths in simple minds. By this means He ensured that His teaching should be remembered and brooded over till the shell burst and the kernel struck deep into their intelligence. It is in this way that we must understand this paradox of our Lord.

For here He unquestionably gives utterance to a

great law of the spiritual life. That law is this—that if we give up our will to the will of God with a true and pure heart, holding nothing back, but in full self-surrender, putting everything we have and are on His altar, then everything we give to Him He returns to us in all its fulness, its joy, its power to bless ; and with this return, something is added which gives everything else new meaning and value and happiness—the life eternal, which is man's true quest and God's highest gift. In other words, the true spirit of self-surrender or altruism enables us to re-enter into and possess, from a higher standpoint, all the lower blessings of life, which, when loved for themselves, are a hindrance to our highest life, but which, when the soul is right with God, and He is supreme in our heart, have a true and noble place in that life. Or to put it into still other words, true self-sacrifice means, in the end, true self-realisation. God does not demand our all that He may impoverish us, but in order that He may enrich us. He first places at our disposal all the natural blessings of life—the earth and all its riches, experience and all its wealth, the relationships of life, so full of joy and reward, dear souls to love and cherish. Then He demands that we should be prepared to surrender all these to Him, not in word, but in deed, because, unless He holds the supreme place in our heart, all else is lowered and depreciated. And then, finally, when all is surrendered to Him, without any ulterior motive or reserve, He gives back what He has taken away in a higher sense, giving it all a new rich meaning, increasing it a hundredfold in value and preciousness because He gives Himself with it, whom to know and to possess is to have eternal life. This is a soul's drama in

three acts—first, there is Life's Gift, then Life's Surrender, then Life's Return. Let us look at those three aspects of the same great reality.

I

The Gift.—The natural life is a given life; we inherit it from those who have gone before. We are what we are, and we find ourselves in this great scheme of things, not because we have asked to come into being, but because God has willed that so it shall be. In a sense, life has been forced on us. We did not ask to be born. But there is that in us as a native instinct or endowment which forces us to cling to life as something which is in itself, and in what it brings to us, a good thing. The passion for life is the strongest passion in our nature, overriding every other passion which for the time may conflict with it. And let pessimists say what they like, the vast majority of mankind have found and do find it a good thing to be alive. The world is a beautiful world, in spite of the many ugly things in it; it is a happy world on the whole, in spite of its many sad episodes and its occasional frightful tragedies; and it has true pleasures and noble enjoyments which are well worth having for their own sakes. We often depreciate the natural life and its experiences, but that is because we are thankless and selfish, miserable in ourselves, and knowing not how to make the best of the Divine gift. The vast preponderance of human experience tells us that the life we now live is a good life, and the world where we find ourselves is a good world to live in. The healthy soul always feels that it is a boon to be alive and "to look on the face of the sun."

Some time ago I cut out of a newspaper a remark-

able document, which was found, after his death, among the papers of a harmless but insane man in a lunatic asylum, being, indeed, his last will and testament. He had nothing of his own to leave anyone, he said, but he left to all the great beautiful world in which they lived, with its rich experiences and possibilities, to those who came after him. I do not know in what sense this man was mad, but if this document be the proof of his madness, then I think that Ibsen's sarcastic saying is very true, that "what the world most needs to-day is more lunatic asylums," for here is nothing but wisdom of the purest and insight of the clearest into the right way of looking at life and its blessings.

"My right to live, being but a life estate, is not at my disposal, but, these things excepted, all else in the world I now proceed to devise and bequeath. I give to good fathers and mothers, in trust for their children, all good little words of praise and encouragement, all quaint, pet names and endearments, and I charge the said parents to use them generously, as the needs of the children require. I leave the children for the term of their childhood the flowers, fields, blossoms, and woods, with the right to play in them, warning them at the same time against thistles and thorns. I devise to the children the banks, the brooks, and the golden sands beneath waters thereof, and the white clouds that float high over the giant trees ; and I leave to the children long, long days to be merry in, and the night and the moon and the train of the Milky Way to wonder at.

"I devise to the boys jointly all the useful idle fields, all the pleasant waters where one may swim, all the streams where one may fish, or where, when grim winter comes, one may skate, to have and to hold the same for the period of their boyhood. The meadows, with the clover, blossoms, and butterflies thereof ; the woods and their appurtenances—squirrels, birds, echoes, and strange noises ; all the distant places which may be visited, together with the adventures there to be found. I give to the said boys each his own place by the fireside at night, with all the pictures that may be seen in the burning wood, to enjoy without let or hindrance and without any encumbrance or care.

"To lovers I devise their imaginary world, with whatever they may need, as stars, sky, and red roses by the wall, the bloom of the hawthorn, the sweet strains of music, and aught else they may desire. To young men, I bequeath all boisterous and inspiring sports and rivalry, and I give them disdain of weakness and undaunted confidence in their own strength. I give them power to make lasting friendships and prepossessing companions, and to them exclusively I give all merry songs and brave choruses.

"To those who are no longer children or youths or lovers I leave memory, and bequeath them the volumes of the poems of Burns, Shakespeare, and other poets, and to live over their old days again without tithe or deductions of any kind.

"To the loved ones with snowy crowns I bequeath peace, old age, the love and gratitude of their children, until they fall asleep."

This is a prose-poem on the beauty and preciousness of the simple things of life which are within the reach of all, and the right to which no one can dispute or take away from us. Yes, the natural, given life is a good thing, and it may be made a rich and beautiful thing for all. And it is all the gift of God to His children.

II

The Demand.—Yet this is the teaching of my text—the Giver of this good thing demands it back from us. At any moment He has a right to ask us to surrender our right to the simple joys and blessings of our natural lives, that He Himself may rule in undisputed supremacy in our hearts, and that we may do some great service for Him.

And for a great reason. We are children of time, and are made to enjoy the blessings of time. But we are also children of eternity, and it is for eternal things that we should really live. Whenever, then, the good things of time stand in the way of the

better things of eternity they must give way; we must be willing to set them aside at once without question or demur.

Sometimes it may be that we are called to make a literal surrender of the dearest earthly ties, to leave home and friends, country, and all that they mean, that we may follow the will of Christ. That was the sacrifice that the disciples had made. They had left all and had followed Him. In other cases men and women have been called on to give up liberty, and all its sweet accompaniments, that they might be able to witness in times of persecution to their faith in Him and their willingness to suffer for Him. In thousands of cases they have languished in horrible prisons till they have died of fevers and malarial poisons, and if they have survived they have gone through the inquisition chamber to the stake, never flinching from the greatest sacrifice of all, which is life itself. That is what our volunteer soldiers have done in this war, which is the particular form in which this call has come to them. And we must not forget that these soldiers and the patriots and martyrs of all ages who preceded them, of whom our own history as a nation furnishes a great and noble army, were as much in love with life as we are. They loved wife and children as much as we do, they loved liberty and green fields and their favourite haunts as we do, yet they gave all up that they might help Jesus to come to His own in the world. I often think of John Bunyan in Bedford Prison, with only a word between him and liberty, who yet remained there for years and years rather than utter that word. At any moment he might have gone free from gaol if only he had given his promise not to preach. But he would not, for he

could not. It was a terrible trial to a man of his temperament, and the thing that made it most difficult of all was not even the love of liberty. He had a little blind girl, of whom he was passionately fond, who needed special care and nourishment; and though he was able to earn something in prison for wife and children by cobbling shoes—or was it making bootlaces with tags?—the thought of this little blind girl and his inability to help her to what she needed, weighed with an almost intolerable anguish on his heart. Yet he would not say that word which would seal his mouth when he got out, for preach he must of the love of God and the Cross of Christ, and so for those long years he chose to suffer exile with the people of God rather than sign away his right to speak of the Saviour and to urge men to receive Him to their hearts.

We are not called on to give up husband and wife, children and possessions, for the sake of Jesus Christ, and that is mainly because such men as Bunyan have purchased the freedom into which we were born. But the call comes to us in another way. We are called to set the things of the spirit above the things of the senses. We are called to surrender interest for duty. We are called sometimes to remain poor rather than become rich in shady ways. We are called on to give up our ease, our leisure, our pleasure, that we may save our fellow-men and bring the influences of the Gospel to bear upon them. We are called to be such men and women in regard to all our natural life and its relationships, that if the old days of persecution were again to break out, and we were called to give up everything for His sake, we should do so at once and without hesitation. For the true law of life is that Jesus Christ who

stands for all that is holy and Divine, is King and Lord, and when His rights, His crown rights, are in danger, then everything must go that we may defend them. Therefore He says: "Whosoever loveth father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me."

And this sacrifice, will you please bear in mind, is not to be done sadly and reluctantly, but joyously, and with a sense of happy compulsion. Do you remember the parables of the treasure and the pearl? When the finders discovered these, what did they do? They went and sold all that they had that they might buy them. And in what spirit? "Who for joy thereof"—the discovery of the treasure of the pearl—"went and sold all that they had!" This was no unwilling sacrifice, for these men were not thinking of what they were selling, but of what they were going to buy; not of what they were giving up, but of what they were going to gain. Their hearts were in the transaction; they gave up all they had, with sacred hurry and insistence, that they might possess what would make them rich for life. And so the true followers of Jesus are not mere slaves of duty; they do not give up everything as though they were losing their all. True, there is a kind of religion which is sad and sombre and miserable. There are people who do right with a very wry face; who go to church as though they were going to a funeral; who sing, and pray, and listen to sermons as though they were longing to get away, that they may do something really interesting.

But that is not religion according to Jesus Christ. He asks for no unwilling sacrifice. We are to give

Him our all with gladness and a "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Not till we can take what we love best and lay it gladly at His feet are we worthy of Him who gave up heaven for us, emptying Himself of His glory, and becoming "poor for our sakes, that we through His poverty might be made rich." It is the half-hearted people who are the miserable ones. It is those who love their life too well to surrender it to God who lose heaven. And the reason why with so many of us religion is a grey, mean thing is because we live a divided life, keeping back a "part of the price," like Ananias and Sapphira, so missing the very thing we seek.

III

But if we are ready to make this full surrender, what will happen then?

Something which is a true miracle, at least from the worldly point of view. All we have surrendered comes back to us multiplied in value. Great tides of life will return to us in flood and power. It is as though something infinitely deep and high suddenly broke in on us, and we find ourselves on a new earth and under a new heaven. It is a small thing to say that religion enables us to enjoy life best. What I mean is that it gives new meaning to all our natural sources of happiness, and invests them all with a new quality and sweetness. If we try to get the best out of life without God, then there is no best in life to get; but, as Jesus once put it, if we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, "all these things shall be added unto you." For, let me repeat it, Jesus does not call us to follow Him in order to impoverish us, but to enrich us;

not to take away life's best things, but with life to give the best things. It is the truly Christian man who gets the most out of life after all. The common day is full of plot interest to him whose heart is right with God. The rose for him will blush a deeper crimson, the sunset glow with a more miraculous flush, and the starry night lift itself above him with a nobler splendour, for is it not all "Godlike and His Father's"; and does He not say to every one of us, "Son, all that I have is thine"? And so if you want to love father or mother, wife or child well, love God more; if you would make life deliver up its innermost sweetness to your hand, deny yourself its cheap fascinations that its inner worth may be revealed; if you would make the best of this world, live for the next. There is no manner of doubt that at long last the people who make the most of life are those who "hate" it for Christ's sake, that they may be able through Him to love it without sin.

XVII

THE DIVINE FORGETFULNESS

"O remember not against us former iniquities: let thy tender mercies speedily prevent [go before] us."—Ps. LXXIX. 8.

"I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."—JER. XXXI. 34.

"The Past is plainly in one sense unalterable; it has happened, and to all Eternity it will have happened. But the value of the Past is not irrevocably fixed; it remains to be determined by the Future."—REV. W. TEMPLE: *Mens Creatrix*, p. 172.

MAN's cry and God's answer, that is our subject: man's cry—for pardon, renewal, restoration; God's answer—willingness and power both to forgive and forget. "O remember not against us former iniquities." "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Such is the systole and diastole, the heart-beat of the universe; human sin, Divine anger and judgment; human repentance, Divine forgiveness and reconciliation. It is the Gospel as in the swing of a pendulum.

I

Man's Cry for Pardon.—What is this sense of sin that pursues man so persistently, and of which this cry of the psalmist is a proof that we can neither get away from it nor forget it without help from above? It is an indication at once of man's grandeur and of his impotence. God and Nature seem at strife

within us. Ought and fact are at war in our experience. All that we should be, all we might have been, rises upon us in clear, tormenting vision ; then what we have been and what we are gives this the lie, and torments us still more. And so that strange sentiment, or experience, or quality of our nature, rises in power within us—remorse, which is the feeling engendered by the changelessness of an ill-spent past, in whole or in part.

The pleasures of memory have inspired poets—all but the greatest—oftener than its pains. But memory, if it has its Beulah land, has also its valley of humiliation ; if it has its heaven, it has also its hell, and the greatest of poets have not forgotten this. How to remember—that is a process which, with much pain and weariness, we strive to master in our schooldays ; but how to forget—that is an accomplishment which not a few of us would fain master in after-life, but cannot. When the psalmist cried, "Oh that I had wings like a dove, then would I flee away and be at rest," he may have thought that what he wanted was to get away from his circumstances ; what he really wanted to get away from was himself. And that no man can do. The sinner carries his chamber of horrors within him—in his bosom. It is the "worm that dieth not," the "fire that cannot be quenched." It is the perpetual judgment-day of the soul.

I say that the greatest of poets have not forgotten this. It is the central motive of many a Greek tragedy. It is the undertone that runs beneath the music of the Psalms. It inspired Shakespeare to write "Macbeth" and many fine unforgettable scenes in other plays. In modern literature it produced that classic poem of remorse "Eugene Aram."

And even if we have not sinned openly and shamefully against the laws of convention or decency, there is no soul that can read these dramas and soliloquies without an echo, clear or faint, rising out of the depths of his own spiritual consciousness.

Memory may sleep, but it never dies. It often seems capricious, depending as it does partly on laws we cannot control. It is true that we often forget what we desire to remember. It is even true, thank God ! that memory is usually more tenacious of past pleasures than of past pains. That is why we are prone to idealise the past. It is true also that liars have short memories, which means that their lies vary so that they often contradict themselves, not that they forget that they are liars. But that is no defence for any of us against the trouble I am dealing with. Memory, I say, sleeps, but never dies. Men are always liable to sudden awakenings, during which the past opens its graves, and the sea of forgetfulness gives up its dead. The first effect of the wind of God's Spirit on our souls—that wind which "bloweth where it listeth"—is the sudden revival of the thought of our sins in lines of fire and tongues of flame. The first result is to drive us to despair at the thought that nothing we can now do will undo what once we have been ; the second ought to be to drive us into the arms of hope, by seeking refuge where alone deliverance can be found—the atoning mercy and love of God our Father through Christ our Saviour.

It is the fear that even death may have no power to kill memory and drown remorse that keeps many a man from suicide, who otherwise might rush headlong into eternity to escape from himself. We remember Hamlet's soliloquy :

"To be, or not to be ; that is the question :
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against the sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them ? To die, to sleep;
No more : and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep ;
To sleep, perchance to dream ; ay, there's the rub ;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause !"

That pause has brought many a man back from the brink of the "undiscovered country, from whose bourne no traveller returns," and which may bring him an awakening, a freshening of memory, which no man who has sinned could bear to meet, lest he may suffer pangs worse than those of death and the grave. And yet, if it is possible to develop on a photographic plate the minutest details that were impressed upon it six or twelve months ago in the fraction of a second, who shall say that death may not be a bath through which the soul passes when the body is shed, reviving in one clear and burning picture all we have ever thought and done, and that to their remotest consequences ?

But that is not all. We can bear many memories, if we think they are only our own, safely locked up in our own bosoms. But there is another Consciousness than our own; other than that of the whole human race—a universal Consciousness, pure as the light, holy as holiness itself can be ; which holds all that has ever happened to us and within us in its unfailing, unfading grasp ; which, in a word, never forgets. And thus, if human memory were really to fail, the Divine memory would still remain, and that is

no mere passive, careless, indulgent thing, but the incarnate conscience of the universe, quick to resent iniquity, and unfailing in its reaction against it. The thought of this tremendous cosmic memory is one of the precious safeguards of goodness in the universe; it is the ultimate bar of judgment at which all good and evil must receive their verdict; it is the true corrective of an easy-going optimism as regards the issues of wrongdoing. "Whither," said the psalmist, uttering the innermost cry of the sin-tossed soul—"whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold Thou are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand hold me. If I say, The darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me." So witnesses the devout spirit. And the prophet, speaking in the name of God, answers: "Can any hide himself in secret places that I should not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill the heaven and the earth? saith the Lord." "The Lord cometh forth out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the earth also shall disclose their blood, and shall no more cover their sins." There is no escape not only from God's knowledge of the present, but from His memory of the past.

II

The Transformation of Memory.—Can we wonder, in view of these solemn facts, that men's prayers have ever gone up for some merciful dispensation of Almighty Grace, by which this crushing

weight of past failure, frailty, and sin may be lifted from the burdened soul?

We long for forgiveness; but "forgive and forget" is the only complete and satisfying forgiveness. "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to Thy mercy remember Thou me for Thy goodness' sake." "Remember not against us former iniquities; let Thy tender mercies speedily prevent us; for we are brought very low." "Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever; behold, look, we beseech Thee, we are Thy people." "Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities." Here are a few of the prayers that have ever gone up to heaven for this release from the bondage of the past, from the pangs of an outraged and unforgetting conscience. There are confidences which we perforce share with God, which we would fain were erased from His mind and ours, and prayer is the natural refuge of the soul in view of them. "We cannot destroy the record of the past—can God?" That is the question.

Now, strangely enough, but unmistakably, there are, even in the Old Testament, abundant suggestions that the despair into which we are thus thrown proves our sure refuge, for there are assurances that this prayer is answered. God can and does forget sin, in a real sense, as well as forgive it. "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions, for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." "Blessed is the man whose sin is covered," which is hidden away and so forgotten, "and whose transgression is forgiven." "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of Thy people, Thou hast covered all their sin." And in our text we are told with equal clearness, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sins will I remember no more."

Can we go a little deeper into this matter, and ask in what sense this can be? Let me begin by emphasising this unquestionable fact—that God Himself cannot undo what once has been done. As an infinitely good and holy Being, He cannot say that anything which has once happened has not happened, that a sin actually committed was not committed. Nor can it mean that God ignores sin. Sometimes a man in authority professes to ignore certain breaches of rule for expediency's sake; as a man he knows that they took place; as an official he pretends that he does not. Or sometimes we agree to say, "Let us forget such and such a thing," and we turn our minds to some other thought or fact which absorbs our whole attention. In not one of these senses can God be said to forget sin. We cannot predicate a double consciousness of Him, one as Ruler and one as Father, so that He can afford to ignore in the one capacity what He knows in the other. God's official character is His real character; and so we see that it would be impossible for Him to condone anything, or ignore it, or treat it as though He knew not of it.

We shall not come into any satisfying faith in the forgiveness and forgetfulness of God till we realise that all this reality of sin remains, and must remain, for ever; and yet that forgiveness and forgetfulness are both real. *What we have to realise is that a fact may remain, and yet that it may be so transformed by a new relationship, that its meaning is completely altered.* Let a great wrong be done, but let the temper and attitude of wronger and wronged be changed, and that which once separated the two into hopeless antagonism and enmity may become a link to bind them more firmly than ever into one. A

friendship which has been broken, but which has been healed by a thorough reformation on one side and a thorough reconciliation on the other, is the greatest of all friendships, for it has stood the greatest of tests. Thus the memory of the wrong that once divided the two, instead of separating them, may help to bind them into one ; it is no longer a mere memory of wrong, but of something which, however evil, has been used by forgiving love as its greatest opportunity and its noblest triumph.

What are the conditions for such a transformation of memory as this? They are twofold. There must be, in the first instance, a clear manifestation of willingness to be reconciled on the part of the one who has been wronged, and as clear a proof of repentance on the part of the sinner. And, secondly, there must at the same time be a clear vindication of the law of right which has been outraged, proving that the reconciliation is not a compact in further wickedness, that it is not a mere ignoring of the offence through collusion and weakness.

Let us take a typical case, such as is given in one of Horace Bushnell's once famous illustrations. We will imagine a father and son who have been long bound in the warmest love and affection, whose natural relation has become glorified by the sense of moral and spiritual friendship. After years of such companionship the son is led astray. Remonstrances, tears, appeals, are equally unavailing to bring him back to the old happy relationship. At last his downward career culminates in open rebellion and insult, and in a blind fit of rage he smites his father senseless and marks him cruelly for life. Then he flees and drowns his remorse in even deeper draughts of self-indulgence. When the father partially

recovers he hears one story after another of his son's shameless profligacy, till there is scarcely a vice or a crime that is not associated with his name. How shall an ideal father bear such a tragic trial? He has been insulted, wounded, outraged in heart; he bears a scar that can never be removed of the brutal fury of his son; the ancient name has been dishonoured and dragged in the mud. All this notwithstanding, he feels an unconquerable desire to reclaim his errant boy. Though his whole nature rises in revolt against the treatment he has received, his love reaches out beyond all barriers, and his set purpose is to do all he can to reclaim the prodigal. At length he hears that he is smitten with a loathsome disease, which carries with it the seeds of danger to all who come near. His companions in guilt forsake him, and there is no one by to nurse him or befriend him in his sore need. At once the father leaves his luxurious home and enters the filthy garret, that he may, if possible, save his son's life and bring him home. The son recovers, awakening from his delirium to find his dishonoured father risking his very life for his sake, for he has caught the insidious fever himself, and seems on the point of death. At once all the horror of his sin breaks upon the son, and all the wonderful love which his sin had outraged. Now all his efforts will be to secure, first, the recovery of his father, and then his forgiveness. Let us imagine that he in turn, though weak and ailing still, by assiduous care and devotion saves his father's life. Ah! if now he can be forgiven, he will surely live a different life! Will the father really take him to his heart again and give him another chance? He will, he will! That is what he has come all this way to secure, that is why he

has undertaken such risks and sufferings! And so the breach is healed and the friendship renewed. Where, now, is the savage revolt on the one side, and the bitter resentment on the other? Gone—for ever gone! Where is the memory of that career of sin which scarred the souls of both men? *The record is still there, but its meaning has been for ever altered.* To the father it appears now as his opportunity for proving the unconquerable depth of the love which could survive so deep a shame. To the son it is the most wonderful proof of a love "which many waters could not quench," and it will for ever remain as the monument of a forgiving spirit which even sin could not exhaust. The tale of sin is "covered," "written over" as it were, by the story of redeeming love, and its record, while it still remains, has been annulled. And the scar that still runs across the father's visage, though it remains, no longer preaches its damning accusation, for the shame that caused it is suffused in the love that has transfigured it; thus the scar of sin becomes the token of forgiveness. The vicarious suffering of the innocent for the guilty, while it for ever indicates the true relationship between father and son, transforms the consequences of sin into the means of redemption.

III

The Reconciling God.—And let the Cross of Christ bear eternal witness to the fact that God has in and through it done for the race far more than any earthly parent could do for an erring and rebellious son. We can see all the rigours of the Divine holiness bent in utter willingness as the Saviour dies on the Cross, and joining hands with the

Divine love in its glorious outreach towards the world's salvation. Some have taught that God looked upon Christ as the substitute for the sinner, and that He poured upon Him the vials of indignation which the sinner deserved. I prefer to say that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, stooping under the Cross which was the logical and final issue of human sin in its antagonism to the Divine holiness—that sin which dragged down the life of the Sinless One beneath its own shameful consequences, even while it utterly failed to drag Him into its own evil. The Cross of Christ is the furthermost point in the journey of heavenly love in seeking to bring back the lost; a love that bent all the Divine attributes (as the earth is bent into an orderly orbit under the stresses that carry it round the sun) into a perfect circle of reconciliation. And so when man, recognising this miracle of atoning love, repents, and is reconciled to God as a dear child, the result is a moral forgiveness, which is also in a true sense a moral forgetfulness. What matters it now if the mere fact of sin can never be erased? A better thing has happened, for it has been transformed. You have often seen how the sun on stormy evenings transfigures the clouds of tempest into banners of glorious colour and light, setting in a splendour it has created out of the fogs that would quench its light. So on Calvary the blackness of man's sin becomes the opportunity for God's love to be thrown into relief. It is the imperishable monument of that Divine grace which can make the night of sin break into the morning of forgiveness, and, having done so, overflow the world with its light.

Therefore we can echo the prophet's words to-

night and say: "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

XVIII

THE POINT OF VIEW

"And he answering said, Lo, these many years have I served thee . . . and was lost, and is found."—LUKE XV. 29-32.

I

I AM not going to preach on this parable directly on this occasion, nor even upon that portion devoted to the Elder Son. The truth I want to emphasise is one that arises incidentally in the course of this conversation between father and son; and though it is only suggested, this is done more forcibly than in any other passage of the Bible that I can think of. It is the immense difference that is made in our thoughts, our feelings, our attitude towards everything by the point of view we take up.

Here are a father and son talking about the return of the prodigal to his home. One might expect that they would take exactly the same attitude towards such an event, and that the brother would rejoice as heartily as the father. Nothing of the kind! What to the father was a source of boundless joy and gladness is to the son a matter of offence. What! hold a feast, kill the fatted calf, have music and dancing and merrymaking just because a ne'er-do-well chooses to come home after spending all his fortune on foolish and sinful pleasures, and receive him back as though nothing had occurred! The

thing was monstrous, immoral; moreover, it was grossly unfair to himself, who had never had a fuss made of him, though he had always behaved himself decently and been a good son. And so "he was angry, and would not go in." Then the father comes out, and puts the other side. He is troubled at the coldness and hardness of the one brother towards the other. To him the one great thing was this —he had lost his son, and had found him; he had been dead, and is alive again; he had wandered far and got lost, and now he is safe home once more. Here was the fact which had driven him almost wild with joy. "It is meet that we should make merry and be glad!"

And how true to life all this is! What a deep lesson is here!

Epictetus, the wise slave, gives us a parable which he calls the "two handles." "Everything," he says, "has two handles. By the one it may be easily carried, by the other not at all. Thus, if your brother has injured you, do not take hold of this event on the side of the injury, for that handle will not support it" (it is, as we say, "intolerable"), "but take hold of it by the other handle, and say: 'Well, he is my brother, after all, and we were brought up together in the same house.'"

So the elder brother took up this event by the wrong handle, and it became an intolerable burden to him. He had probably felt very deeply the disgrace which had been brought on the family by the profligacy of the younger son—very proper people do feel such family troubles sorely—and it seemed to him a cheapening of all morality and good behaviour to show more joy over the return of a prodigal than over the unblemished record of his own

life. That was how he looked at it, and it was a very natural point of view. Nevertheless, it was the wrong point of view. It left out of count higher things ; it ignored the very deepest and truest laws of life. It was these higher things that the father thought of—the rescuing of a lost soul, the opening of a foul prison-house, the home-coming of a wandering son. What were mere reputation and public opinion and foolish convention compared with this glorious recovery ? Let the heart have her turn, there has been sorrow enough and to spare ; let the fatted calf be killed and the feast be prepared, and music and dancing be the order of the day. "For this my son was dead, and is alive again, and was lost, and is found!" The elder son's point of view was that of law, the father's that of grace : the son was the guardian of morality, the father was the exponent of religion : the son represented social opinion, the father the Gospel of the grace of God.

II

And this difference between one point of view and another runs through life. The broad facts of life are the same for all of us, but the impression they make is not the same ; and so you will not get two men to agree absolutely about anything. You have parties in the State, you have schools of thought among philosophers, you have "tendencies" in theology, you have divisions in the Church of Christ —evangelicals and higher critics, sacerdotalists and Broad Churchmen—you have believers and unbelievers in religion, you have disagreements even in the home. Human life is a complex of diverse and often contradictory opinions, attitudes, and points

of view; there is a perpetual conflict of judgment as well as interests over all the world.

We take for granted rather too readily that this is as it should be; indeed, that it promotes the best interests of the world when we all freely take up and advocate our own special view of things. Within limits this is doubtless so. If all men agreed about everything, this would be a monotonous planet to live in. Constituted as we are, we find that the jar and struggle of many opinions is one of the conditions of discovering truth, which is always many-sided; it is even one of the conditions of progress. It is practically impossible for created beings to rid themselves of causes of disagreement. The personal equation will never be quite eliminated from human thought and life. Nevertheless, there is another side to all this, and it is well to emphasise it. Truth is one: there is a right point of view and a wrong, a good one and a bad, a noble one and an ignoble one, for all of us; and it is part of the discipline of life that we should come to a working agreement about certain great central facts of the world, and learn to take the right point of view towards them. The aim of all scientific and philosophic thought is to reduce the confused mass of ideas to a unity, and one of the aims of religion is to reduce the higher ideals and practical conduct of men to something like harmony. About some things we can always afford to disagree, for it does not greatly matter which side we take about them, nor whether, indeed, we take any side; but about some other things we cannot afford to disagree, for they determine the kind of men and women we are, and whether our life shall be a progress and a joy, or a hindrance and a sorrow to ourselves and others. This is clearly

shown in this parable. You will notice that the father does not allow the elder son's point of view to be a right one; he blames him very gently it is true, but very firmly, for the stand he takes. "Son," he says, "thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. But it was meet that we" (note that pronoun, not "I" but "we"—you and I—for there is here no room for differences of opinion)—"it was meet that we should make merry and be glad, for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, but is found." That is, there is here a determining, central fact which should make us one in judgment as well as in heart.

III

Let us note some of the disturbing causes in human judgment which make men take different points of view in life. That would help us to see where legitimate differences end and where unity should begin.

1. The first great determining influence or point of view is temperament.

We are born with a bias. We all tend to favour one side or other of every disputed question. There are inherited influences that make us give more weight to this view than to that. One man's blood is tainted, and he is a pessimist by nature; a sunbeam has crept into another man's blood, which makes him an optimist through life. This we cannot help; we must accept ourselves and each other as we are. But we must not permit ourselves to be slaves to temperament. Here is something which should make us charitable to others and hard on ourselves. Be thankful if God has so made you that you naturally tend to take sunny views of life, to make light of

your troubles, and to see the fringe of hope shining on the edge of every cloud of darkness; but do not be hard on your brother who is afflicted with the opposite tendency. And you who naturally walk on the shady side of the hill, and feel your sorrows so deeply, and make so much of every difficulty and hindrance to your will—you must never be satisfied to remain as you are, nor must you envy your lighthearted brother too much, for he, too, has his snares. We are here to correct our defects, and to make the most of our natural excellencies. The sanguine man must not make too much of life's sunshine, and ignore its tragedy and misery; the melancholic must not indulge in morbid fancies, and cast a wet blanket on the happiness of those around him. And so the cautious man and the eager, the practical and the idealistic, the companionable and the solitary, must see to it that the disturbing factor of temperament is not permitted to warp their judgment or interfere with their desire to put themselves in other people's place, and realise things from their point of view, so that all come to a more balanced judgment as to the realities around them and the duties that lie to their hand.

2. Another cause of wide differences in point of view arises from early training and environment.

Here, again, is a great factor in life. Different men are surrounded by different circumstances and influences all their days. A Frenchman is brought up very differently from an Englishman, and a Russian from either. The boy who is surrounded by wealth and luxury and sent to a public school becomes a different man from the son of an East End docker, brought up in a home often visited by

hunger, and educated in a school to which he has often had to trudge without breakfast. Ease or hardship in youth tend to make very different creatures of us in later life. And so we have our class standpoint, and our class politics, and our class remedies for social evils, and our class religion. So much is more or less inevitable; we cannot altogether help it. But does this justify men in ignoring every point of view but their own? Does it make the aristocrat right in despising the middle-class man, or the middle-class in taking a superior attitude towards the working man, or the working man in shaking his fist at those in other walks in life? We are not responsible for our parents, nor the houses in which we were born, nor for our upbringing—these things were provided for us. But what we are responsible for is the perpetuation of differences that make men's opportunities for decent living, and culture, and comfort, and success so different, so that one man's lot is hard and miserable all his days, while another man enjoys the good things of life, not because he has deserved them by good character and hard work, but simply because he has been born into them. What is wrong is that we should worship wealth and despise poverty, and cry shame on the poor victim of circumstances, and blame the man in the dock without knowing his temptations, and hold ourselves high above those who have been dragged down to the dust through no fault of their own. Men are more than circumstance. We should fight hard, therefore, for the human standpoint, and do all we can to rise to a charitable, kindly, and, above all, just judgment on all these sources of difference between men.

3. This brings me to the last and greatest source

of difference in the point of view—and that is character.

After all, what chiefly determines your point of view towards God and man, and life and death, is yourself—the kind of man you are. What was the final difference between the father's point of view in this parable and the elder son's? It was that they were different men. The father was a large-hearted, high-minded, loving man, and so, when his long-lost son came home a repentant beggar, he opened his home and his arms to him, saying, "Welcome home, my son—welcome home!" The brother was a mean, self-centred, sour-souled creature, with a jaundiced eye and a heart of ice, who looked at everything from the point of view of self and how it affected him, and so "he was angry, and would not go in." And you will find the stamp of character on every human judgment. By a man's opinions I can judge what manner of man he is. "Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and their conscience are defiled." Into everything we think and say and do character enters as the chief controlling influence; and if it is true that "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he," it is also true that "as he is in his heart, so thinketh he." What we are determines everything in the end. There is a secret laboratory within which puts its stamp on the whole man, and controls his point of view towards everything.

IV

All I have so far said is preparatory to what now follows, with which I close.

On whatever subject we may differ—and there

will always be differences between every two people in the world—our final place in the world and in the sight of God will be determined by this—what is our attitude towards religion, towards God's offer of grace and mercy, towards Jesus Christ? When the Gospel message comes home to our conscience, and we have the offer made to us of life or death, blessing or cursing, our answer to that will settle everything.

I know that there is no subject so full of mystery, and therefore so full of open questions, as this question of religion. From the beginning until now it has been the happy hunting-ground of controversy. It will be a long, long time, if ever, before we come to the same precise creed, and there are few more calamitous things than the attempt to hurry that moment. But these differences are all on matters of theory; though we do venture to hope that some day we shall come in religion, as is to-day the case with science—that the process of unity will be brought to a head, and the whole world be one for all high purposes. The present question is one that is not much affected by which school of theology we belong to, or whether we are conservatives or higher critics as to the structure of the Bible, or Calvinists or Arminians as to doctrine. It is this—what is to be our attitude towards the claims of Christ?

The point lies here—you are bound in the end to take one of two attitudes towards Him. You must ultimately, at long last, say "Yes" or "No" to His claims. You must finally obey Him or disobey Him. You must range yourself on His side or against Him. For in the last analysis there are only three kinds of people in this matter. There are those who have surrendered themselves in His hands: true

Christians who may differ in a thousand things, but are agreed on this—that they count Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father. There are, secondly, the people who have either not had the offer or who have not yet taken up a final stand in view of it. There are, lastly, the people who have heard His call, and received His invitation, and seemingly have finally refused it. Which class do you belong to? If to the first, happy are you, for you are on the side of peace, and righteousness, and joy, and eternal life: if to the last, you are in danger of falling into the awful company of the lost. And if you belong to the second, who have not yet made up their mind, then I warn you that this cannot go on. You will be forced to choose in the end. For Jesus stands on the parting of the two ways—the way up and the way down, the way of life and the way of death, the way of heaven and the way of hell—and we are doomed to travel one of these ways. And though at present there are these three classes of people, the saved, the lost, and the undecided, in the end there will be but two—those who are for Him or those who are against Him. No one is clearer than Jesus Himself about this. So to one or other of these classes, I repeat, we must all belong sooner or later.

And the reason is this—that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the final touchstone of human life and character. There are many preliminary tests; this is the last, to which all others lead up. I appeal to you who have not yet come to any decision—what are you going to do? You say you are full of unanswered questions; you cannot make up your mind on this or that preliminary problem. Possibly that is so. None the less, you are practically taking up some attitude towards Jesus Christ. You cannot

help it, for here is no mere question for the intellect, it is a question of moral attitude, and therefore of practice, of conduct, of life. To postpone this answer is to answer it so far in the negative ; at best it is a waste of precious time, and at worst it is to prepare for a final " No." Indeed, you are answering it in some way all the time : in the secret field of moral decision you are casting the die day by day in His favour or against Him. Therefore, it is your highest wisdom to bring this question of final choice to the issue at once. For if you do not settle this question voluntarily, it will settle itself. Finally, it must come to this, that " he that is not with Me is against Me."

XIX

FORGIVENESS—HUMAN AND DIVINE

"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us."—MATT. VI. 12.

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God also in Christ forgave you."—EPH. IV. 32.

IF we were asked to distil the essence of the Christian Faith into a word we should undoubtedly use the term "holy love" to represent it, and if, further, we were asked to name the most representative act, or fact, or virtue, of the Christian Faith, that act, and fact, and virtue would be love in the act of forgiveness. For God, and man, and the world, being what they are, love is simply forgiveness at the root, and forgiveness is love in the fruit. The mystery and glory of our Faith are in the words "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." The Cross is God's forgiveness in operation. The ministry of the Gospel is the ministry of reconciliation. We stand in every pulpit simply as God's ambassadors, proclaiming pardon to the world, and beseeching men, as in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to Him as dear children. The Christian life is the forgiven and the forgiving life, accepting from God what we pass on to others, freely receiving, freely also giving. What men most need from God is forgiveness, and what they most need from each other is also forgiveness. For

sin means the outrage of friendly relations, and forgiveness is the renewing of friendly relations on a basis of love and righteousness. God, if I may say so, is most like Himself in the attitude of free pardon. Man rises so as to be most like God in the same Divine act: he "loves most who has been most forgiven," and he shows love best, in its finest aroma and sweetness, who is most willing to forgive. Forgiveness is the crest of the wave of God's love; there it breaks into redemption. It is the key to the inner mystery of love; it is the condition of salvation; it is the seed of eternal life. God forgives, but only on condition that we forgive. Has it ever struck you that this is the only human act which we are permitted to take into God's holy presence, and plead it as a reason why He should do to us as we do to one another? There is a grand audacity, if I may say so, in this clause of our Lord's prayer, in which He takes for granted that, whether in God or man, forgiveness is the same thing. God's forgiveness is only man's on the grand scale; man's is God's in miniature. Therefore, is it not needful for us to look into this mystery where God and man are one?

I

Let us begin with laying an additional emphasis on the essential oneness of this act in God and man. Here is a point where God's finger touches us, and passes into our souls the very essence and beauty of His own life.

"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us!" Do you realise the grandeur of your claim, when, having forgiven some injury, some spiteful attack, some mischievous word

against your character or your interests, you venture to ask God to deal with you as you have dealt with your open enemy or your false friend? Are you prepared to abide by the issue of such a claim? Is your forgiveness such that, if God extends forgiveness to you in the same kind and measure that you have meted out to your fellow-man, you will feel satisfied? "Consider, and bow the head."

In the second passage we have the same fateful reality taken in obverse. God's pardoning grace is here made the incentive and pattern of our forgiveness. We must endeavour to treat one another as God has dealt with us. "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another" (being graciously, forgivingly disposed towards each other —that is the precise bearing of the Greek) "as God also in Christ forgave you." Well, we are accustomed to look up to heaven for the type and pattern of our virtues. That is what we should naturally do. But the point is still that in its essence the Divine act of forgiveness, while more perfect in quality, with infinitely greater heights and breadths and depths in it, is still the same in kind as the human. We recognise the richness, the scope, the beauty of God's pardoning grace in Christ, and St. Paul tells us we are to do the same, and be the same to one another, as God is to us.

Now look at these two passages again. They are like the obverse and reverse of a medallion. On the one side we see the human edition or form of forgiveness, faint and blurred and badly drawn, almost indistinguishable, yet clearly authentic. Then we turn it over, and see the shining, clear-cut pattern of the Divine forgiveness. A great contrast! Yes; but the same medallion! On the obverse and the reverse the same inscription: as—so; the spirit, the

act, the meaning of forgiveness is the same in heaven and on earth, in the Creator and in the creature, for He made man "in His image and after His likeness." Let us examine this great mystery in the light of these two tests—measuring the human by the Divine, and recognising the Divine in the human, till we come to the central point of light that shines in every true act of forgiveness.

II

1. We will begin with the lowest type of forgiveness, such as we find among men. I suppose that this lowest form is the mere repression of revengeful feelings, and the dismissal of any intention to injure the man who has sinned against us.

The first impulse in the human heart is to retaliate when wrong is done. Probably no man of any grit or courage was ever struck without provocation without wishing to return the blow with interest. It is a part of the natural instinct of self-preservation; and as it is a part of nature's equipment for the adequate care of one's own life and interests, there is nothing essentially wrong in it. It is not in this so-called primal instinct for self-defence that sin resides, but in what it so often develops into—the steady flame of resentment, the burning thirst for revenge. The natural man does not feel comfortable till he is at quits with his enemy—till he has given him, as it is put, as good as he has got. Even in our best moments and moods it costs us a struggle to repress these impulses, and some of us never succeed in doing so. It is strange how men in the most civilised relations in life, educated, refined, cultured men, will treasure up and remember a slight or an injury—say from a

rival, or a subordinate, or a colleague in business—and when the time comes they will show a diabolical pleasure in bringing it home to him. Let me give you an instance mentioned to me by a friend in the city some time ago. The post of financial editor to one of our great newspapers fell vacant. Two candidates among others stood out easily first in their merits, and the directors could not decide between them, so they referred the matter to a prominent member of the Stock Exchange, who knew both men well, and who also knew that one was really a much better man than the other. But that man some years previously had written a scathing article about some transactions in the blame of which this man had been made to share. It was a perfectly straightforword and legitimate attack, but it had rankled; the arrow had gone deep, and this financial king, being asked years afterwards to recommend the better man for the post, deliberately recommended the less desirable candidate to the directors. It was just the lust for revenge triumphing over every consideration of honourable conduct; it was just the Red Indian instinct of waiting for his enemy till he came by, that he might surely be slain without knowing why or by whom. The war paint and feathers were gone, but the instinct of the vendetta, the thirst for blood, was still there.

And there are some who will say that if they successfully repress this brute instinct for revenge, and decline to take advantage of a man to his hurt who has injured them, they have forgiven him. "Yes," they will say—"yes, I will forgive him; but I don't want to have anything to do with him. I have done with him so far as friendship is concerned."

I am inclined to think that this form of so-called forgiveness is more frequent than might be imagined, and that there are large numbers of people who really plume themselves upon such an attitude, and think it quite praiseworthy. And yet, what does it amount to? It is but a negative form of revenge. The revengeful feelings still remain ready to burst into a fierce flame at the slightest renewal of the provocation. If such a condition became universal, the world would consist of silent, gloomy, suspicious atoms, mutually repellent, each harbouring a world of secret dislikes and antipathies, or coldly watchful of one another and "without natural affection."

Let us now test this idea of forgiveness by our two standards: "And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us."

Is that the way you forgive? And is that the kind of forgiveness you are prepared to receive from God? Would you be willing for Him to screen His face from you for ever and leave you to your own poor resources in the conflict with sin and death? Then why do you pray to Him? If you only want your enemy to keep out of your way, why do you not keep out of God's way, instead of besieging Him with petitions for His notice and favour and love, and so making it as it were impossible for Him to ignore you?

Clearly this notion of forgiveness will not satisfy the first test, for we could never ask God to deal with us like that. Our very approach to Him would give the lie to our theory.

What of the second test? "And be ye kind one to another . . . as God in Christ hath forgiven you." How does it meet this test? Is that the

way God has treated us in Christ? Did He send His Son into the world to tell the world that if it would go its own way and not trouble the Father then He would let it alone? Nay! "God commendeth His love to us, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. . . ." "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. . . ." "Herein is love, not that we love Him, but that He first loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. . . ." "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." There are a score of passages in the New Testament that break into music in showing how the forgiving love of God puts to shame this heathen shadow of forgiveness, which claims that when we have determined not to injure our enemy we have pardoned him. And if we turn to the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, where the doctrine of practical forgiveness is illustrated in a concrete manner, we shall find that where, according to this theory, the injured party ends, the true follower of Jesus is to begin.

"Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between him and thee alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established," etc. (Matt. xviii. 15-18).

It is clear from this that, so far from leaving our enemy alone in cold aloofness, and treating him as an outcast and a publican at the start, we are not to do that till all the resources of a reconciling spirit

have been exhausted, and the injurer has refused every overture of renewed friendship.

And so this first and lowest conception of forgiveness will meet neither the human nor the Divine condition of true reconciliation.

2. Let us rise a step higher. There is another stage of forgiveness, in which a man is ready for reconciliation if adequate proof is given of repentance, but in which he simply waits for that proof and will not move a step to awaken such repentance or meet it half-way. That is to say, the injured man is quite willing to accept overtures, but as it is the other side that has sinned, he says it is his part to come forward to say that he is sorry.

Now here we see at once that a great step in advance has been taken. There is a vast difference between the man who practically forgoes all chance of real reconciliation and the man who is willing—nay, waiting—to "make it up." There is no true forgiveness in the first case at all, but in the second it is quite genuine when once the condition is fulfilled.

And no doubt this condition meets our natural sense of justice. In common fairness it is the place of the sinner to take the first step towards reconciliation by saying, frankly, "I am sorry, and I am willing to do all in my power to put matters right." Unless he does so, sooner or later, there can be no reconciliation ; and it is right and fair and just that the one who has done the injury should be the first to stretch forth his hand and, confessing his sin, ask heartily and humbly for pardon.

But we are not here to consider the dictates of natural justice, but to expound the law of Christian forgiveness. And so we will apply our tests again.

What of the first? "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us."

Is not this first canon of pardon fulfilled? At first sight we might think so. When we pray like this we certainly do go to God confessing our sins, and with a great desire for reconciliation in the heart. Prayer itself means that we have such a desire. It is a mockery to ask for forgiveness if we do not want it; and that implies sorrow for sin, and at least a desire to sin no more. And yet, when we catechise our heart of hearts, do you think that we should have dared to approach the Great Being against whom we have sinned so continuously and grievously had He not already been beforehand with us and done something to invite us to Him? If we only saw an open door in front of us, and read an inscription of amnesty over it, but saw within no welcoming face, no beckoning finger, no pitying smile, should we have found courage to come hither? I dare not think so. The sinner is not so ready to believe in the warmth of his reception; and if God had only coldly promised to accept in mercy all who came to Him, there would not be many—would there be one?—who would have so great an audacity and pressure of eagerness in him as to push forward in faith even to the footstool of the Most High asking for free pardon?

Well, putting that aside, what of the second canon or test? "And be ye kind one to another," etc.

Now, did God the Father merely send His Son to proclaim His readiness to forgive those who dared to come to Him? Is He a passive agent in the redemption process, waiting for an active advance from a sinful but repentant world? Does even the ancient promise, "Behold, He waiteth to be gracious" sum up the evangelic message? Who that reads of

the pursuing love of God, that marches like an army with banners down the centuries of the Old Testament, laying siege to the sinful, obstinate, stiff-necked nation of Israel, and pleading like a mother over a wayward boy with that wilful chosen race—nay, who, with the face of Jesus looking in winsome invitation from the Gospels, and with His voice pealing across the centuries in the perpetual music of the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Prodigal Son; who, listening to the systole and diastole of the Holy Spirit's love throbbing through the Epistles; who, seeing the thundercloud on Calvary, and watching with dimmed eyes the unspeakable tragedy of the Cross, and hearing the undying whisper, "Father forgive them"—can take such a shallow and inadequate view of the Divine passion and action for the redemption of the world as to say that He merely "waits" to be gracious, beautiful in its place though that sweet phrase may be? Waits? He has refused a thousand times to give up this sin-soiled planet and leave it in its sin; He has done more than the prodigal's father—watching for the first glimpse of the returning rebel and running to meet him; He has poured forth His great heart in a flood of forgiving love, till the slowness of men to respond has been their worst offence of all, and but for His unconquerable mercy we should long ago have perished in our sin.

Nor shall we forgive each other as He does if we simply wait for all advances to come from the other side, and do not go forth in some ministry of invitation to those who have hurt or injured or insulted us in some way. To forgive so may be forgiveness, but it is not the kind we can plead before God, when we say, "Forgive us . . . as we forgive."

3. So we will go one step farther, and lay hold of the completing idea of forgiveness as taught in the New Testament and embodied in the Gospel. If we keep our eye on the Divine pardon, we shall find that there are still two or three steps to the complete ideal.

(*a*) The first of these is the manifestation of a true passion for friendship, which will never be satisfied till we have done our best to turn every enemy into a friend.

Surely the passion of hatred has had its long, long day in the world! Men have found that there is a certain brutal joy in revenge, and in anger, and in all uncharitableness, and they have drunk this bitter-sweet cup of vengeance to the dregs. Is it not time that the passion of love should begin its day? That men should taste the sublimest joy that even God can experience—" the joy of an aggressive spirit of forgiveness." To heal the wounds of friendship, bind up the spirit of the broken-hearted, and transform hatred and indifference into attachment and love, is not this Christianity—is not this Christ? And are not we who call ourselves by His blessed name recreant followers when we fail to follow Him here, whose love was so great that ingratitude, death, and the grave could not quench it? Truly the passion for friendship was the dominant note in the blessed life, and Christ could not be happy—I was going to say cannot be happy—fully, completely, sublimely happy, so long as He has an unreconciled enemy in the world.

(*b*) But is there not a second step to be taken in the gentle art of forgiveness? Does it not imply that when others injure us, and use us ungratefully, that we should see their sin as they ought to see

it, and repent in their name and for them? You may think that I am here leaving the solid earth and rising to heights of impossible magnanimity; but I would remind you at the close of my discourse, as I did at the beginning, that I am not expounding a method, but the Christian method of forgiveness. And the Christ-spirit is this, if it is anything. What does the passion and mystery of the Cross mean among other things but this—that Christ took our sins upon His pure heart, repenting of them in the name of the race whose nature He had taken upon Him, and offering to God this pure and perfect repentance on our behalf?

We cannot enter into the full meaning of the Cross, but we surely cannot but see that over the soul of the crucified Son of Man the sense of the world's sin swept like a wave of midnight darkness, and that it almost overwhelmed Him as He offered Himself to its fierce tides of agony and loneliness. And we must see, too, that God in His forgiveness shares this Divine sorrow for sin. It means that He sorrowed over us, repented for us and in us through His Son, and so stamped for ever on the face of sin its infinite ingratitude and blackness and shame. But for this there could have been no atonement, no reconciliation; it is only when we see God, as it were, weeping for and over our iniquities as if they were His own, that we see sin as it is, and so can adequately repent of it and hate it. "As God also in Christ forgave you!"

And that is to be our spirit also toward one another. We are to feel the shame of others' sin as well as our own; we are to sorrow over the evil that they have done to us, not only because we have suffered from it, but because they have done it. We

cannot forgive that evil as God forgives ours till we have thus grieved over it, almost as though it were our own.

(*c*) And then, finally, there is the act of pursuing grace, the bringing of all the loving energies of the spirit to bear on the sinner, that he may be brought to see and share in this attitude towards his sin, not with a view of triumphing over him in self-righteousness, but that he may himself be reconciled in the true spirit of repentance in an atmosphere of love. Here we enter the inner sanctuary of the Divine love and pity, which in a sorrow that has joy at its heart wins back the soul into the restored, nay, the glorified relation of friendship—a relation which is never quite complete in its experiences till it has both received and bestowed forgiveness.

So we climb the last height from which we see into the profoundest depths of this great Christian act of forgiving love, and enter into partnership with the forgiving God, and with the atoning Christ, and with the Spirit that doth ever make intercession for us.

> "O man, forgive thy mortal foe,
> Nor ever strike him blow for blow,
> For all the saints on earth that live
> To be forgiven must forgive.
> Forgive him seventy times and seven,
> For all the saints that are in heaven
> Are both forgivers and forgiven."

XX

THE UNSPEAKABLE GIFT OF GOD

"Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift."—2 Cor. ix. 15.

The unspeakable gift of God referred to is Jesus Christ as the risen and ever-living Lord and Saviour of His people. To the writer and to those he was writing to Jesus was more than a memory, He was an ever-present reality. He had lived and was dead, and "lo, He was alive for evermore." In that He had lived, the perfect ideal of life had been revealed to them. Because He had died, the one great hindrance to the attaining of that ideal had been removed—they had been "reconciled to God as dear children." Because He had risen from the dead, the ability to realise their ideal had been given to them, for they lived in the "power of His resurrection." When he thought of all this, and all that it meant to him came rushing in upon him in a great flood of spiritual emancipation, he cried out: "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!" One of the needs of the hour is to regain this ecstasy of faith in our Living Lord.

When St. Paul wrote these words it was the sunrise hour of Christianity. The evangel he brought with him was a new thing, a glowing message, so fresh, so unheard of, so green with promise, so bright with hope, that those who received it into their hearts found themselves on a new earth, under a new

heaven. Because of their faith in Jesus there was a brighter light for them in the sky, a lovelier fragrance in the flowers, a clearer sparkle in the breaking wave and the flying cloud. They look on each other's faces and read there a deeper meaning in love, a sweeter pathos in suffering, and a happy light resting even on the still brows of their dead. They lived in a spiritual dream which give new reality to life. The lover who has been just accepted by his loved one was not more moved to joy and gratitude than these early Christians at the thought of the love in which they were married to Jesus Christ—the bridegroom of His people. This bridal joy glows all through the New Testament and burns through all sorrow into ecstasies of praise, like the sun through bars of morning cloud. The Apostle seems here to be using the language of hyperbole, and yet he was simply describing accurately the wonderful depth and range of gratitude which filled the heart of the infant Church at the thought of Christ their living Lord.

Two thousand years have passed by since then, and the inspiration of the first century has become the commonplace of the twentieth. And the problem, as I have said, which we have to solve for ourselves, is to turn this commonplace once more into an inspiration.

And this is a task that is not easy. We are surrounded by many "unspeakable gifts" that have become commonplaces. I wonder, for instance, what we should say if all the memories of our yesterdays were blotted out from our minds, and, while still in full possession of our faculties, we were placed on a hill an hour before sunrise to watch the dawn? Should we be able to express our wonder and admiration at the miraculous change from dark to light which silently takes place every morning, and which

because it takes place day by day we hardly ever think it worth while to get up early enough to watch? I wonder what would be our feelings if we had grown up in some city court-yard and had never seen the spring transforming the face of the earth, the trees putting forth their verdure, the flowers their blossoms, and were then suddenly let loose on the Surrey hills in June? Would it not seem an "unspeakable gift" to be alive? I wonder what human language would be rich enough to express our feelings if, having been ill from infancy with some incurable disease which had taken away all the joy of life, we were suddenly to wake and find ourselves well, full of the zest and gladness of living?

Many of us have enjoyed the priceless boon of health since we can remember, and few of us ever dream of giving way to an overflow of thankfulness for it. It is a commonplace! All of us do feel a certain thrill of gladness at the annual renewal of the earth in spring-time, because it comes only once a year; but there are few who really bless God for the light which every day turns the darkness into day and makes all things fair and new. It is the function of the poet, the painter, the musician, and the mystic, to awaken the sense of romance at the thought of the common day, the familiar landscape, the quickening air; they are the magicians who show the fairyland in which we are always living, but are too blind and deaf to know it! They put into form the joy and gratitude we ought all to feel for these common but unspeakable gifts of God.

I

"Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift." There is one gift of God which is above the light

of the sun in preciousness, for He is the Light of the world ; above the joy of spring-time, because He is the source of the new life ; above the glow and pulse of health, for He is the Healer and Physician of the soul. Jesus Christ is all this to those who have true faith in His name. And therefore "unto them that believe, He is precious." He is the "unspeakable gift" of God. Every Lord's Day we remember His coming, and around the happy human joys that fill the day with gladness it is well that we should rest awhile with devout thankfulness on that blessed life which means so much more for us—if we could but realise it!—than we can put into clumsy words or halting music.

It is a matter of constant wonder to me that so many truly religious souls fail to appreciate the place that Jesus Christ ought to hold in their spiritual affections. They enter into the Christian view of the world, of the Fatherhood of God, of His free forgiveness, of the Divine love that has cradled them into vigour and virtue, of the hope that transforms death and takes away the sting of the grave. But they fail to see the place Jesus has had in the revelation and proof of these great living truths. They are Theists, and that is all they will confess to—that they are "believers in the one true and only God." This, they think, is the real essence of religion.

And so it is. But the question is—how do we come into possession of these things? The stream flows, but where is the spring? The light fills the sky, but where is the invisible sun? There is health and vigour coursing through our veins, but where is the medicine that has healed us, and the spiritual bread that is feeding us at the roots of life?

Let us not fall into the shallow mistake of thinking

that because we happen to hold certain Christian views of the Unseen, of duty, of the future life, that this is all we need. We must go behind these things and realise their efficient cause. And that efficient cause is not to be found in any reasoning process; it is not to be found in the Biblical revelation as literature; it is not to be found in the Creeds, the Church, the priesthood, nor in any of the institutional safeguards of religion. The efficient cause of faith and hope and love in the Christian religion is to be found in the historical Person who embodied in Himself the Divine light, love, and power, and who poured out His life even unto death for the salvation of the world. It is to be found in Him "who lived, and was dead, and is now alive for evermore."

I do not say that no one can live a beautiful and truly Christian life who has lost touch with this historical objective personal side of the faith. There are men and women of the most Christlike spirit, whose intellectual attitude represents a mass of negations as to the origins of Christianity. There are souls who have the devoutest sense of the awfulness of sin and of the dear forgiving love of God who have ceased to believe in any "theory" of the Atonement. There are people who retain a true hope of a blessed immortality who do not believe in the physical or even spiritual resurrection of Christ from the dead. This is indubitably true. None the less have these central elements of faith come to them through the Christ whose Living Person they have lost hold of; none the less is their faith fed by His spirit and influence; none the less, if there had been no historical element in Christianity, and if there was no living Christian Church to-day, would this diffused and bodiless faith, which is so marked a feature of

our times, gradually die down and at last vanish from the earth. The stream in the valley flows on for a long time after its sources in the hills have dried up; the twilight lingers on in the west long after the sun has gone down. So faith may for a time survive the eclipse of its origin.

But it has been true in all ages, and it is true to-day, that the living nerve-centre of historical religion is to be found in the experience of that select company of believing men and women who know that Jesus Christ is all in all to them, and who for that reason are the real Church of Christ. This is the true Apostolic succession, this is the real "channel of grace." The unspeakable gift of God is not the Bible, nor the Sacraments, the Creed—these are but the vesture of the truth. "The unspeakable gift of God" to the world is the historical Jesus who is also the Eternal Christ.

II

And now, brethren, the practical point of all this lies here—how are we to renew in our own hearts and those of others a due sense of the place of Jesus in the religious life? If without Him the Christian Faith is like a circle whose centre has vanished, like a sky out of which the sun has disappeared, how shall we come to realise what the New Testament writers call "the glory of the Son"?

There are many ways in which this has been done. "Of His fulness have we all received, and grace for grace."

1. Shall we examine once more and in detail that exquisite picture of Him that is enshrined in the four Gospels? This has been analysed and criticised and torn to pieces and put together in so many ways

of recent years that it is strange that anything of it should remain. Yet somehow it vindicates itself against all assaults, and refuses to dissolve in the most searching alembic of criticism. Whatever of Christianity will have to go, it is now certain that the portrait of Jesus that we have in the four records is going to remain with us.

That face "decomposes but to recompose," and shines on with undimmed radiance from the sacred page; the loveliest dream that ever visited the longing eyes of the race, and loveliest of all because it is a portrait of a matchless original, and not a mere ideal of the sanctified imagination. Let us gaze on that face and drink in the glory of God that shines through it. Let us follow the glorious figure—so gentle yet so strong—of the Son of Man as He moves along the country lanes of Galilee and through the streets of Jerusalem, followed by eager crowds that hang on His lips and would fain touch the hem of His healing garment. Let us listen to His voice embodying in simple beauty of phrase and simile the quickening laws of the kingdom, and calling on men to follow Him as He led the way into that kingdom through the gateway of lowly service and vicarious sorrow. Forgetting the theories that have been spun about His person and His work, let the impression of His personality have its way with us, and the grace of His life steal into us like a perfume, and His spirit breathe its sweet torment of unrest into us till we penetrate into the secret of His inner peace and joy. Above all, let His Cross and Passion, so mysterious, so wonderful, and yet so simple in their appeal to our need and our longing, speak often their message of remission and pardon; let His Resurrection message preach to us the

promise of His perpetual presence. What other life-record is in the smallest degree comparable to this? Or of what story is this magic power true, that it ceases to be a mere story of the past, but becomes a central all-controlling fact and power in the present?

2. Or carry the same method into the later ages, and see what Jesus has been to humanity—the centre of the stormy forces of life always, for He came not to bring peace into the world, but a sword—and yet, with all that, the centre of the world's deepest peace and highest joy! How He has mingled with the life of the race, disturbing, quickening, impelling, calming, inspiring—a quickening redeeming power in nations, communities, individuals. He has created empires and brought them to naught. He has quickened civilisations into life, and suffered them to pass into dissolution to make room for better. A fine book was written a few years ago by a leading German theologian on "Jesus in the Nineteenth Century," in which it was shown how in that latest space of time, equally with earlier ages, He had mingled with the currents of the complex life, thought, politics, economics, as well as religion, of the whole continent of Europe, and had always somehow been a determining factor. All this will help us to recover and realise the meaning and value for us "moderns" of God's "unspeakable gift" in His Son.

3. If I had time I would ask you to make a brief excursion into the devotional literature of the ages, and note how those most intimate with the spirit of Jesus have told the story of their intimate friendship with Him, and of what He has done for them. The great mystics—the author of the "Imitatio," Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi

Tauler, Law, the long stream of sacred song-writers —all these have borne perpetual witness to His abiding power to mingle with the inmost life of His chosen friends in all ages. This literature of gratitude and adoration is now at a strange discount, but it is full of green pastures and still waters for the soul. It would be well, if we would know what the love of Jesus is, which "none but His loved ones know," to spend a little time occasionally in this "garden of delight," this historic paradise of love—the mystical literature of the Christian centuries.

4. But all these "disciplines" in the knowledge of Jesus are but preliminary to the final authentic step which can alone give us what we want. His claim from the beginning has been a personal one. Those who know Him only through the testimony of others, however beautiful and convincing that may be, do not yet really know Him as He can be known. It is only when we enter for ourselves into the circle of His friendship, and bend our stubborn wills to His authority, and realise the benediction of His spiritual presence as Redeeming Lord, that the secret of Jesus can be fully revealed. The contemplation of His distant figure in the past, the stimulating story of His work in the hearts of men of old, or of those around us to-day—these are good, but they are still outside the soul's true life. It is when the veil is lifted for us, too, and we pass from the threshold where we can but contemplate and expect into the secret place where He communes with His own as it were face to face—it is only then that the last barrier is removed, and we come to know for ourselves the meaning of this exulting doxology, "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift."

Let us close with two simple experiences of my

own. Some years ago I was spending a summer holiday at a northern seaside resort. One morning I got up early and wandered across the harbour bridge into the fishermen's quarters, which look so picturesque from across the harbour, but which are so squalid and wretched when you are among them. There was scarcely anyone about, but presently I lighted upon a poor woman who was washing the doorstep of her little cottage, and entered into conversation with her. She was very old and evidently very poor, but she was clean and neat, and on her face was written the record of many sorrows. She told me she was a childless widow; her husband and four sons had been fishermen, but one by one they had all been claimed as victims of the hungry northern storms, till she was left alone in her old age. "Well," I said, "you have had a hard and bitter life; however have you borne it all?" "Yes," she said, as her face lit up glowing with the faith of a lifetime, "it has been hard indeed, almost too hard to bear." And then, passionately, she continued: "Oh! I could never have borne it, but for my Jesus; but He has helped me through."

A few months later, on a bleak and sleety February evening, I found myself just outside King's Cross Station. At a corner of the street I bought an evening paper from a poor and ancient-looking but bright-eyed old man. A shrivelled little woman, with a face as brown as a berry and as wrinkled as a walnut, was with him, helping him to distribute his papers. I entered into talk with them. They, too, were evidently wretchedly poor. It was very raw and cold, and yet they were both as cheerful as possible. "My husband," said the wife, "is deaf and dumb, but he is wonderfully clever at finding out what people want; but I like to be with him

when I can." "Don't you find life very hard this wintry weather?" I said. "Yes, hard enough," said she, "but not too hard, sir; for, you see, we belongs to One as can make any kind of life easy if you trust Him." "You mean Jesus Christ?" "Who else?" was the answer. "We've been married for forty years and loved Him together all that time, and He has never disappointed us yet."

These are very simple stories, scarcely worth recounting. But, dear friends, have you mastered this wonderful secret for yourselves yet? You, too, have your sorrows and your trials and your difficulties in your life. You may not be so poor as those simple folk of whom I have been speaking, the testimony of whose faith was so wonderful in the hard circumstances of their life, but you have often enough to bear. Where do you turn when life is hard and things go wrong, and you are at the end of your tether? Can you say with the northern fisher-woman, "He has helped me through?" Can you say with the Cockney newspaper-woman, with her deaf and dumb husband to look after, "He has never failed us yet"? He can help us all through. If we put our trust in Him without reserve He will "never leave us, nor forsake us."

O Thou who hast given us life and breath and all things, we bless Thee for all Thy gifts, but most of all for the unspeakable gift of Thy Son Jesus Christ. In His name, on this His day, we assemble ourselves together. Through Him we come to Thee; in Him we find ourselves; by Him we find each other and call all brethren. May we to-day realise our oneness in Thee; and rejoice together in the love and mercy of our God. Inspire our worship; make our service glad and fruitful; and fill us with that Presence which means love, and life, and power.

XXI

WHAT ABOUT PRAYER?

"And it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place . . . one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray."

LUKE XI. I.

WHAT about prayer? What do we mean by prayer? Is it necessary to true religion? Does it do any good? How are we to pray so as to gain full benefit from it?

These are the questions I propose to deal with to-night as simply, honestly, and earnestly as time will allow. It is a big subject, and half an hour all too brief to do deal with it; all I can hope to do is to throw out a few hints that may meet some current difficulties.

I

Religion and Prayer.—What is their relation?

In order to be free from the suspicion of narrowness and professionalism, I will ask you to listen to an exposition of this matter from the pen of a French philosopher rather than from any theological source. "Religion," says M. Auguste Sabatier, "is an intercourse, a conscious and voluntary relationship, entered into by a soul in distress, with the mysterious Power upon which it feels itself to depend, and upon whom its fate is contingent. This intercourse is

realised by prayer. Prayer is religion in act—that is, prayer is real religion. . . . Religion is nothing if it be not the vital act by which the entire mind seeks to save itself by clinging to the principle from which it draws its life. This act is prayer, by which I understand no vain exercise of words, no mere repetition of certain sacred formulæ, but the very movement itself of the soul, putting itself in a personal relation of contact with the mysterious power of which it feels the presence—it may be even before it has a name by which to call it. Wherever this interior prayer is lacking there is no religion; wherever, on the other hand, this prayer rises and stirs the soul, even in the absence of forms and of doctrines, we have living religion." Any form of so-called religion, therefore, which makes no room for prayer is not properly a religion. "If it cuts off man from prayer, it thus destroys itself. It leaves the soul and God a mutual remoteness, with no intimate commerce, no interior dialogue, no interchange, no action of God in man, no return of man to God." Such an attitude may imply a philosophy, but it is not religion.

Or, to quote from another philosopher—Professor William James, of Harvard—"This intercourse [implied in prayer] is realised as being both active and mutual. . . . If it be not effective, if it be not a give-and-take relation, if nothing be transacted while it lasts, if the world is no whit different from its having taken place, then prayer, taken in this wide meaning of a sense that something is happening, is, of course, a feeling of what is illusory, and religion must be classed, not simply as containing elements of illusion—these undoubtedly everywhere exist—but as being rooted in delusion altogether, just as

materialists and atheists have always said it was. . . . The genuineness of religion is thus indissolubly bound up with the question whether the prayerful consciousness is the very core of living religion" ("Varieties of Religious Experience," pp. 464-66).

Prayer and religion thus imply these three assumptions—"that God and man exist as real persons; that they can come into mutual fellowship; and that from prayer or active communion with God there are certain spiritual or other benefits that come to man." That is exactly what is meant by that great verse in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God [*i.e.*, in prayer] must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." To put it in a word—no religion, no prayer; no prayer, no religion. These two terms imply each other, as high implies low; or, we may say, just as love implies loving, so religion implies praying. If you have given up prayer in any effective sense, you have given up religion.

To make this still more clear, let me quote from the book of a writer who once appears to have been anything but a religious man, but who has recently gone through a kind of conversion, and has even (after a fashion) joined the ranks of theologians—I mean Mr. H. G. Wells—a kind of "Saul among the prophets." In his remarkable book, "God the Invisible King," he has a passage so very evangelical and searching that one has hopes that, having come os far, he will come a long way farther before he has done. Dealing with the question how far we can speak of God as love, he is distinguishing between the love of man and woman and the love that is religion; and he goes on to say that, while "the exalta-

tion of the love passion comes and goes, the exaltation of religious passion comes to remain. Loves are the windows by which we may look out of the prison of self, but God is the open door by which we freely go, and God never dies, nor disappoints, nor betrays. [The love of God] is far more like the love of comrades, or like the love of a man and a woman who have loved and been through much trouble together, who have hurt each other and forgiven, and come to a complete and generous friendship. There is a strange and beautiful love that men tell of that will spring up on battlefields between severely wounded men, and often they are men who have fought together, so that they will do almost incredibly brave and tender things for one another, though but recently they have been trying to kill each other. . . .

"That is man's love of God. But there is also something else: there is the love God bears for man in the individual believer. Now this is not an indulgent, instructive, and sacrificing love that a woman has for her baby, it is the love of a captain for his men. God must love His followers as a great captain loves his men, who are so foolish and helpless in themselves, so confiding, and yet whose faith alone makes him possible. It is an austere love. The spirit of God will not hesitate to send us to torment and bodily death.

"And God waits for us, for all of us who have the quality to reach Him. He has need of us as we of Him. He desires us, and desires to make Himself known to us. When at last the individual breaks though the limiting darkness, the irradiation of that moment, the smile and soul-clasp is in God as well as in man. He has won us from His enemy. We come staggering into the golden light of His

kingdom to fight for His kingdom henceforth, until at last we are altogether taken up into His being" ("God the Invisible King," pp. 79-81).

II

So much, then, for what is implied in religion and in prayer. Why, then, has the subject and the act of prayer become surrounded with so many difficulties? Why have so many "modern" people, who do not wish to be called irreligious, given up active conscious prayer because of these difficulties?

The answer is not far to seek. There are two, and only two, fundamentally diverse views of the government of the universe, and they have of late years come sharply into conflict. These two views of the universe may be called—speaking broadly—the religious view and the scientific view. The religious view of the universe is that it was first created, and is now governed and controlled, by a Personal Being, or God, who has full authority and sway over all things. The physical world, that is stretched out in space, and the world of events that is stretched out in time, are held to be at God's disposal, so that His will is supreme and He can do as He thinks fit with all things. And the same is true of all living persons, except when they freely oppose His will. The religious view of the world holds, however, that even when men do oppose Him, He can yet use them, as He uses all things, to bring about His holy ends in the world. And if all men, and any other creatures who may exist who possess free-will, submit to Him, and join Him in fulfilling His purposes, then His will would be done, and His kingdom would come on earth as in heaven.

Over against this view of the world—the view of

God's free, personal, effective control over everything—stands the scientific view, according to which the universe is "ruled" by a set of impersonal, fixed, unalterable laws, the same always and everywhere, and which cannot and will not be broken through by any spiritual agency. Whatever is, is; whatever happens, must happen; you cannot change anything, nor alter the course of Nature for yourself, nor will God do it for you when you ask Him, for everything is locked in iron bonds of cause and effect. The bullet will find its billet whatever you do, the bomb will burst and kill however hard you pray; and though prayer may have some effect on the soul of the one who prays, it cannot add to or take away from a particle of the force or energy which makes the world go round and carries human folk along with it. This view of Nature ignores or denies the personality of God. It views the universe as a machine slowly grinding out its results, without purpose, or knowledge, or pity for us poor children of the dust. If this is all, then there is no place for religion; and prayer is fruitless in any effective sense. And that is the view of the universe on which most people act to-day, whatever be their professed creed. That is the reason why many people have given up going to church, and why they have ceased to worship. Why make any show of prayer if it is of no use to pray?

III

Now it may sound strange at first, but I believe both these views of the universe to be true; that it is a personally guided and controlled universe, giving ample room and invitation to fruitful prayer,

and yet that it is a machine. In other words, it is possible to hold the religious view of the universe in its simplest sense, and the scientific view in its most rigorous sense, though they seem to exclude each other, and to hold them both in the fullest way. (If I could not do so, I should not be in this pulpit to-night.) As this is the pivot of my whole argument, I must ask you to follow carefully what I am now going on to say.

Let us take a simple illustration. We will imagine that a man is driving a motor-car. This is one of the most perfect and delicate of the many machines made by man. It can only be driven by the most thorough regard for the mechanical conditions of the case. You must first put the parts together with the utmost skill and delicacy. You must have petrol in the tank, a good carburettor to break up the petrol into explosive vapour, a cunningly devised spark timed to the exact moment to fire it, well-balanced pistons to obey the explosion, and so on. If any of these mechanical points is wrong—a little too much or too little petrol, a too late or too early spark, a leak in your combustion chamber, or if any of the mechanical arrangements are wrong in the slightest degree, then nothing will happen: the machine lies derelict by the roadside, as you have often seen it, and as I have to my cost once or twice experienced. You can only drive your car by the strictest obedience to the physical laws in accordance with which the machine was made, and by means of the motive power, rightly directed, supplied by the petrol. The scientific view of a motor-car is the only practical view. It is a machine, and must be used as a machine. Well, but—Does that mean that a motor-car cannot be personally driven? What

is it all for but to be used at will by the person who knows how to drive it, and where to drive it to? Let us suppose you want to be taken by motor from Whitefield's Tabernacle to Victoria. How are you to get this done? Is it not by engaging the driver to drive it for you? If you ask a properly licensed driver to do this, cannot he do so? And what is asking him but a kind of prayer? And when you make such a request or prayer, are you asking him to break the laws of Nature before he can consent? On the other hand, he can grant your request, and he does so, not by breaking, but by rigorously keeping the laws of Nature—*i.e.*, of the machine as made.

Now let us, for the sake of the argument, suppose that Mr. Wells's "Invisible Man" is at the wheel of the car. You know he is there, but you cannot see him. You find the car on the cab-rank lying silent and immovable, apparently, with no one at the wheel. But you ask the invisible driver to take you to Victoria, and you get into the car. If he consents the car begins to move; it threads the traffic skilfully, and eventually arrives at its destination. To the spectator ignorant of the facts it looks like a miracle, for no one seems to be driving, but to you, who know that the invisible driver is there, it is a perfectly natural thing. No law of Nature has been broken, and yet you get safely to your journey's end.

Now the universe is a machine driven by an invisible personal driver or guide, who has made the machine, the road, and the passenger. Prayer is the passenger's request to be taken safely through life to his journey's end; faith is the act of entering the car, and trusting our driver with our life and its direction; and the answer to the prayer of faith is that

the whole universe-machine is God-directed to its destined end. The life of prayer, of religion, is simply a life in which we put ourselves in God's hands, asking to be taken safely through this life into the next, and trusting Him to do so wisely and lovingly, not by interfering with, but by using the laws of Nature which He has ordained for this end. By prayer we simply put ourselves in right relations with the Great Guide and Ruler of the world, so that He may use all things for our true interests. As the Apostle says: "All things work together for good to them that love God." The great machine we call Nature is made for the sake of God's children, and if we pray to Him aright, He will help us to use it for our best interests, and He will lead us "by a way" possibly "that we know not," yet quite safely and surely to our goal.

It is just here, however, that we come to the real problem of prayer. If the human will were always concordant with the Divine, there would be but one thing to pray for—that God's will might be clearly revealed to us, and that strength might be given us to fulfil it worthily. But our wills are our own, and our tendency is to seek to bring the Divine will into accord with them, instead of seeking God's will as the one guiding principle of life. The passenger in the car wishes to direct the Invisible Driver his own way towards the goal, and that way is often the opposite to that leading to it. Thus come the disappointments and failures of the life of prayer, and the loss of faith that follows.

IV

What, then, may we rightly pray for? Only for spiritual blessings? There is nothing we may

not pray for if our spirit is right with God, and we can pray for nothing if it is not. He can give us anything He wills; He is not limited by "Nature," for He made it, and He made it for us; and as He has the power, so He can guide and control all natural processes, be it mechanical forces, or the growth of harvest, or even the uncertainties of weather, if He sees fit to do so. Whether He will alter these things by His guidance or not at our request depends, not on His power (for to any religious soul that is not in doubt), but on His wisdom and on His knowledge of our needs. "If it be Thy will" must, therefore, be the unspoken condition of all our prayers for this or that physical blessing or desire.

But asking for things is not the only or chief function of prayer. It is good "to make known our requests before God," but it is better simply to seek to come into fellowship with Him as friend with friend. It is not the chief function of friendship to ask for this or that, but to interchange our thoughts, to share in our feelings and sympathies, to become one with our friends in a constant interchange of confidence and benefit. Prayer is the opening of the sluices of the soul that the great tide may come in from the ocean into the river-mouth; it is throwing open the windows of the soul that light and freshness may enter in to sanatise and renew the heart; it is giving ourselves in all our littleness and need, that the mighty power of God may flow into us in streams of love and grace, so that we may become the men and women we ought to be—strong to bear, daring to venture, swift to obey, ready amid uncertainty, calm amid danger, "and filled," as the Apostle says, "with all the fulness of God."

That is the life of prayer in essence. It is not

easy to rise to such a life. We are hindered by our innate love of self-direction and self-will; by the pressure of the visible world and the choking cares of life; by the frequent sense of apparent failure of our prayers; and by other subtle and recurrent causes. None the less, the prayerless life is an impoverished, cramped, "mechanised" life; the prayerful life is the only strong, virile, confident, and freely progressive life. Shall we not, therefore, echo this good man's cry: "Lord, teach us to pray"?

XXII

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH JESUS?

"Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ? They all said unto him, Let Him be crucified?" —MATT. XXVII. 22.

I

"WHAT shall we do with Jesus?" That is a question to which we must all find an answer sooner or later.

It is remarkable how severely it pressed on those people in Judea long ago. The story of the trial of Jesus is given in minute complexity and graphic detail in the gospels. Every party in the transaction comes in turn into the foreground of the drama, and on the faces of all of them there is written perplexity, puzzlement, and a certain fear. From one tribunal to another this innocent victim of judicial spite and popular hatred is taken; from one to another He is passed on, each judge seeking to put on some one else the responsibility of His condemnation. Somehow, no one at first wished to pass sentence on Jesus. The High Priest and his party dared not, for they had no power of life and death over any man, so they sent Him to Pilate, and Pilate passed Him on to Herod, "the Tetrarch of Galilee." Herod—"that fox"—for politic reasons returned Him to Pilate, so at once purchasing immunity from

the problem and regaining the friendship of the Roman procurator. At this stage Pilate, having first passed Him to Herod and then finding Him brought back, tried to persuade the people to let Him go free ; and finally, when he saw that this would only cause a tumult and lead to bloodshed, he washed his hands of the guilty deed, and delivered Him into the hands of His enemies to be crucified. The priestly party alone, with the rabble behind them, are ready, at least for the moment, to undertake the dread responsibility of crucifying an innocent and virtuous man. "His blood," they boldly say, "be on us and on our children." And yet even they only earned a short-lived triumph, for many of those who had been ready enough to cry "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" having glutted their spirit of revenge, and watched the last dread act in the drama, as Luke tells us, went away from the Cross in a very different mood. "And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things that were done, smote their breasts and returned," wiser but sadder men. And this early awakening was prophetic of a wider awaking a little later on. Though they had killed Him, they soon found they had not done with Him. No sooner had they congratulated themselves that at last they had disposed of Him for good, than they found that they were only beginning to deal with Him. His death was the starting-point of an influence wider than His life had ever exercised. Out of the grave He arose to assume a kingdom of which there should be no end. When on the morning of the third day a rumour began to spread that someone had seen a vision of angels "which said that He was alive," the empire of Jesus began to dawn, and the empire of those who had murdered

Him began to wane. Neither denial, nor bribes, nor prosecution could any more hinder His march to His throne; and as He advanced, the powers and the influence of those who thought they had done for Him on the Cross slowly but surely died away. Many of those who had cried "Crucify Him!" were presently won over to His side, and were found among those who sang His praises as their Saviour. Annas and Caiaphas, and the priestly party which they had led, steadily lost influence, and thirty-five years later they were finally swept away, with the destruction of their temple and their city. Pilate was presently disgraced and exiled; Herod died miserably. The power of Christianity steadily increased in the Roman Empire, till, centuries afterwards, the last great fight between it and heathenism came to a head, when Julian the apostate, Emperor of the East, who had spent his life trying to reinstate the ancient heathenism, died broken-hearted, crying, "Galilean, thou hast conquered!" and Constantine, the Great (so-called) Emperor of the West, emblazoned on his banners the figures of a Cross with the motto *In hoc signo vinces* ("By this sign thou shalt prevail"). Thus the ancient world was judged by the answer it gave to the question, "What shall we do with Jesus?"

II

Just as true is it that every nation that has flourished in the light of the Gospel since has been judged by the same test. I have no time now to take a bird's-eye glance over the history of Christendom, but you will find that it is broadly and deeply true that the people and the community which have honoured, not the mere name of Jesus, but the

reality for which He stands, have flourished for just as long as they have done so; and that as their realisation of His sovereign place in their life has waned, they have lost touch with their best life, their progress has been stemmed and stayed, and they have slowly dropped out from the ranks of progress. There are many forces that may give a people temporary dominance among the nations of the world—arms, diplomacy, a certain happy conjunction of circumstances, commerce, wealth—but the more the conditions of national well-being are studied and understood, the more clearly is it seen that the permanent conditions of prosperity lie in the spiritual and not the mere physical order. The race that is destined finally to rule the world is that race which will obey and embody the teaching and the grace of Jesus in its laws, its customs, and its ideals; and in proportion as all nations bow to the same standard and follow the same light will they be joined in a holy brotherhood of progress, and bring about the "federation of the world." I may thus say with confidence and conviction that the future of the race itself will ultimately depend on its answer to this question: "What shall we do with Jesus? Is He to be remembered, or forgotten? Followed, or neglected? Buried in a grave of ignoble oblivion, or raised to the throne of human loyalty, and obeyed and worshipped as King of men, Son of the Most High God?"

You will find also that every movement for the world's betterment, every scheme of progress, must take its rank and place, according as it meets or fails to meet, the same test. There are, thank God, endless schemes for hastening the millennium. Every reformer has his panacea for the ills of the world,

every party in the State its measures for the amelioration of society, every social enthusiast his patent plan for making the world what it ought to be. Now you are not left to guess-work or in the hand of the mere expert, for your opinion of these manifold schemes of progress. You can test them all, and find them full of promise or disappointment, by applying this simple rule: "Where does Jesus come in them all? Are they firmly based on the rock of His truth? Do they place their chief emphasis on the improvement and uplifting of the moral nature? Is the reinforcement of soul life, and not the mere readjustment of the social environment, made the centre and pivot of their upward movement? Do they give large and ample room for the principle of the Cross in their organisation—*i.e.*, the principle whereby the best elements in a community spend themselves gladly for the good of the race? Is mutual service, and not self-enrichment, the motive-power of the whole?" Then are they a part of the great redemptive—which is also the great evolutionary—movement of the ages, and they will contribute their modicum of power and influence to the progress of mankind; but not otherwise. Their knell or their victory will ring as their answer to the question, "What shall we do with Jesus?" For Jesus stands for everything that is individually holy and pure, for everything that is socially just, sane, strong, and loving; and it is from Him alone that the healing streams take their rise which can sweeten, purify, and strengthen human life from centre to circumference.

III

But I wish just now to speak not merely about general, social, and national affairs, however essential their relation to Jesus Christ, who is the Saviour of the whole race, the herald of the kingdom of God among men. I came here to speak to you who are before me, to you who have come to hear me for the one time possibly in your life and mine, as I stand speaking in the name of Jesus. And I want you to ask yourself to-night solemnly, and to face the question till you get the answer clearly defined in your own hearts: "What am I doing with Jesus? What do I mean to do with Him in my life?"

Strange—is it not?—that this should be a relevant question at all to you and to me to-day! Jesus, humanly speaking, was a Jew of the first century. He lived two thousand years ago in a provincial country, a mere outpost of the Roman Empire. He belonged to a peculiarly narrow race—narrow in its ideals, narrow in its outlook, narrow in its sympathies. He had no human culture. He had attended none of the world's great Universities. Only once, so far as we know, did He cross the frontier of His native land. He had never been to Rome, the centre of the world's government, or to Athens, the centre of the world's culture, or to Alexandria, the centre of the world's philosophy. All the environal and hereditary influences that made Him what He was were almost parochial in their narrowness; and the official religion in which He had been brought up was quite hopelessly narrow in the fierceness of its fanaticism and the rigid exclusiveness of its spiritual sympathies. He lived and died almost unknown to secular history: a sentence in Tacitus and a doubtful

paragraph in Josephus are all that we can find about Him in the annals of the age in which He lived. Yet here I am, nearly two thousand years later, putting this question to you as the most vital and searching I can utter in the English language, "What are you going to do with Jesus?" knowing that the whole of your earthly life—nay, even your eternal destiny—depends on the answer you give to it. How comes this wonder to pass? And why does no one ever dream of putting this question as regards other great men from a pulpit, or a lecture-room, or in a written appeal to any one? If I were to ask you, "What are you going to do with Aristotle, or Plato, or Homer, or Goethe, or Kant, or Luther, or Cromwell, or Gladstone, or Herbert Spencer, or Darwin?" the question would have a certain intellectual interest, but there would be little that is really vital in it. Yet, when the same question is put to you about Jesus, it suddenly arrests you. You feel that it is a relevant, a vital, an all-important question; and if you can only be got to think of it with sufficient solemnity, you will find that your answer to every other important question that can possibly be asked will be coloured and affected by your answer to this one. Is it not so? And if so, why?

That it is so admits of no question; every man alive, who comes face to face with and fully considers it, settles what he is to be for ever after by the character of the answer he gives to it, or by the way he shelves and dismisses it from his mind. It is the greatest challenge you can put to a man in this world, "What are you going to do with Jesus that is called Christ?"

And the reason is also quite clear. It is because

Jesus somehow, in a way quite unique and peculiar to Himself, embodies, incarnates, concentrates in His own person all that we mean by vital religion. Out of that narrow, parochial environment long ago this wonderful Person arose, with sympathies broad as humanity, with a spiritual horizon as wide as God Himself, with a soul so permeated and incandescent with spiritual radiance, that He has ever since been the "Light of the World"; and right down the ages the critical question comes from Him to every soul on whom His glance can fall, "What are you going to do with Me?" For this question means: "What are you going to do with God? With His holy Law? With His offer of pardon and renewal from sin? With the life He has given to you to use or throw away? With the destiny that awaits you in the world to come?" When Jesus asks us, "What are you going to do with Me?" He means all this, and therefore the question is, as I have said, the most vital and critical you can face.

Have you really faced it?

IV

Some of you, thank God! have done so, and you have given the answer. It is a privilege to know that there are many here before me who have bowed to the claims of Christ, and set Him on the throne of your heart's affections. He occupies a place that no father or mother, husband or wife or children, or any other friend, can claim to occupy in your life. What He says to you is law; what He commands, the rule and norm of your life; what He promised long ago to His people—that He would give them peace of heart and power of will. You have none of

you lived up to the high, inaccessible standard of life revealed in His teaching and embodied in His own character; but in so far as you have done so, you are in no doubt that it is the kind of life you are meant to live, and which you desire to live ever more perfectly. And you realise in your soul that He will judge you by the singleness of your aim and the purity of your motive, and not by the imperfection of your performance.

To you I would say, grow not weary in well-doing. See that you keep the springs of conduct clear and pure. Feed on the heavenly manna of His love and grace. Suffer not anything to come between you and His dear love. Keep your feet in the way of life eternal, and your hands busy unto good. And to this end cultivate the friendship and fellowship and favour of Jesus Himself assiduously, by studying His written word, obeying His lightest commandment, and continuing earnestly in His love. If you do this your life will become enriched and beautiful, and ever more peaceful, and you will end your course here in assurance, for at life's further end you will know that you are passing not into nothingness and gloom, but into "the joy of your Lord."

There are none of you here to-night who have, I trust, finally disposed of this question in the negative, or you would not be here at all. But there are many of you, I surmise, who have not yet decided the question in the affirmative. You are letting the days go by in a condition of uncertainty. Perhaps your mind is greatly divided, and you feel you cannot come to a decision. Possibly the great open questions of religion torment you. You have no satisfying light on the problem of the supernatural, or the per-

sonality of God, or the inspiration of the Bible, or the Atonement, or the Divinity of Jesus. You have an open mind on these questions, but no settled conviction. And till they clear up, you think you have no right to call yourselves Christians.

To you I would say a straight and confident word. In so far as your conflict of mind is between the alternatives of sense and spirit, between the appeal of which we call the world and its fascinations on the one side, and the call of Christ, "Follow me," on the other, I have only to say this—that you are imperilling the interests of your soul every day you continue this delay. While pleasure and self-indulgence and worldliness hold you, even in a half-hearted way, you are untrue to yourself. You know in your heart where right lies, where truth lies, where safety lies. It is on the side of the highest revealed to you, and that is on the side of the Lord Jesus Christ. I do, therefore, implore you not to delay any longer. For He wants you for Himself, and you need Him for yourself; and anything that divides you and keeps you apart is a poison and a snare. Sweep it aside; let nothing stand between you and complete self-surrender to His claims. When you can come to that point, and say from your heart, "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest," the hour of your emancipation is at hand; for "in His service is perfect freedom."

And now to those that are kept from the great decision, not by the counterclaim of lower things, but by intellectual unrest and spiritual perplexity, I wish to say this—to wait till these great questions that puzzle and torment you are cleared up, is to begin at the wrong end and is to endanger the whole position. The personality of God, the problem of the

supernatural, theories of the Atonement and Inspiration, the miraculous, the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection—these are questions that belong to the intellect, and must be solved by it. But the appeal of Christ is not based on these grounds at all. You can set every one of these questions aside for the present. The appeal of Christ is a moral and spiritual one. It meets you not on the grounds of speculation, but of moral choice and conduct. It concerns your attitude towards life as a whole, not its departments and problems. The point is, "Do you recognise His spiritual sovereignity, His supreme right to obedience as the voice of God in your soul? Do you feel that the laws of holy living as He enunciates them are the laws of right? Do you feel that He is the way, the truth, the life for your soul?" Then, let your heart respond to the appeal of His dying but regnant love. If you do this you will find that these problems which trouble you so much now will begin to lose their insistence; you will feel that you can wait for the answer to many of them, that the answer to others is slowly dawning on you, and with faithful obedience and loving service in His name, your insight will broaden and possibly later on in life will lighten unto the perfect day. Anyway, these things do not vitally matter at present, whereas your attitude towards the spiritual claims of Jesus Christ are the determining things in this life and in any other.

"What shall I do with Jesus?" Let us be sure that by this question and its answer you will determine your present and also your ultimate fate. For remember, that while you think you are judging Him, you are really judging yourself, or, rather, He is judging you. I can never in reading the account

of His last trial and condemnation resist the impression that while the High Priest, Pilate, Herod, and the crowd are passing sentence on Him, it is He who is really passing sentence on them. One by one they come under the light of His countenance; one by one they pass into the darkness again, and as they go you can see the brand of their sin burnt like the mark of Cain upon their forehead. Caiaphas the fanatic, Herod the wily, Pilate the vacillating, Peter the impulsive, Judas the traitor—there they stand in the dock, and it is Jesus who is on the judgment throne. What they thought of Him is now not worth the dust beneath your feet. What He thought of them has settled their doom for all generations.

And we, too, must "all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ to give an account of the things done in the body, whether they be good or bad." We must all be judged by the highest we know and have had the opportunity of becoming; and He assuredly is the highest any of us know, and the highest any one else has ever known.

And so for the last time to-night I put this question to you all, "What will you do with Jesus?"

XXIII

IS THE SECOND COMING AT HAND?

"When therefore they were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power."—ACTS I. 6, 7.

IN the *Christian World* of November 8, 1917, a manifesto on the second coming of our Lord was issued over the names of some eminent and respected preachers from various branches of the Christian Church, Established and Free, in which the Christian public was urged to look expectantly in the near future for the visible and miraculous appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the beginning of His millennial reign on earth. Here is the text of that manifesto:

"THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HOUR.

"1. That the present crisis points towards the close of the times of the Gentiles.

"2. That the Revelation of our Lord may be expected at any moment, when He will be manifested as evidently as to His disciples on the evening of His Resurrection.

"3. That the completed Church will be translated to be 'for ever with the Lord.'

"4. That Israel will be restored to its own land in unbelief, and be afterwards converted by the appearance of Christ on its behalf.

"5. That all human schemes of reconstruction must be sub-

sidiary to the second coming of our Lord, because all nations will then be subject to His rule.

"6. That under the reign of Christ there will be a further great effusion of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh.

"7. That the truths embodied in this statement are of the utmost practical value in determining Christian character and action with reference to the pressing problems of the hour.

"N.B.—This is a general statement, which does not profess to decide on particular details of prophetic interpretation."

The following week another group of ministers (or whom I was one) published a letter in the same paper to the following effect :

"We cannot refrain from expressing our profound regret at the manifesto which appeared in your last issue on the 'second coming of Christ.' Without entering upon any discussion of the question which is the subject of the manifesto, we feel it to be a distinct misfortune that at a time when the very existence of our faith is being challenged this attempt should be made to divert the thoughts of serious people in a direction which is, to say the least, highly controversial, and upon which men of equal learning and devotion entertain widely different views. We believe that Jesus Christ distinctly warned His disciples against this kind of speculation. Again and again since the days of the early Church has that warning been unheeded, and men have argued from signs as definite as those of to-day that His coming was at last drawing near, but it has always ended in disappointment. We earnestly hope that the members of our churches will not allow themselves to be led in a direction which is not only highly conjectural, but which we believe is at this time of practical need a sheer waste of time and energy. Our great business is to get the spirit of Christ into men and nations, and leave the future to Him who alone knows its secrets."

This evening I propose to put before you as clearly as time will allow an exposition of the point at issue between these two groups of men, who may be taken as equally earnest students of Scripture, however different their standpoint, and who are all preachers of the Word, and who are equally entitled to a respectful hearing. Though I cordially disagree

with the first manifesto, I will try my best to be fair to those who sent it forth. They are entitled to their opinion, but in mine and that of many others it is a position that is untrue from its foundation, and likely to hinder instead of helping the cause of genuine religion.

I can help you best to find the true perspective of the doctrine of the visible second coming of Christ by a brief historical sketch of this line of thought in the Christian Church.

There can be no manner of doubt that the Gospels, and nearly all the New Testament writings, are more or less permeated with this great expectation. But for its true historical roots we must go much further back than New Testament times. Those roots lie deep in a very remarkable succession of books which appeared during the centuries between the close of the prophetic books of the Old Testament and the coming of our Lord. Those centuries — from Malachi to Christ—used to be called "the centuries of silence." It was supposed that from the time of that prophet till John the Baptist raised his voice in the wilderness of Judea, not a single word was spoken by God to man. The Old Testament canon was closed, the New Testament canon was not yet opened. This in itself was a most remarkable doctrine for anyone to hold who believed in God, but it was held till within living memory by nearly the whole Christian Church. Few any longer hold that strange doctrine. What? God silent to His chosen people for four centuries of recorded time? A better historical perspective has unfolded two central facts: (1) Many of the Old Testament books themselves were written during those so-called silent centuries, notably Jonah, Job, Ruth, Daniel, etc., and many, if

not most, of the Psalms. (2) In addition to these, there was an ever-growing list of books which came in the true succession of the prophets which poured out during that period called the Apocalyptic literature. These books were so named because they dealt with the dark problems of the ruture of mankind, both in this world and the next. In another way they represented the kind of literature which has since come out from age to age from the time of Sir Thomas More, who wrote his "Utopia" in the reign of Henry VIII., down to Henry George, author of "Looking Backward," H. G. Wells, with his "Time Machine," "When the Sleeper Wakes," etc., and others, who are constantly forecasting the kind of world we shall have a century or two hence—with this great difference, that most of these modern writers deal with purely socialistic and economic conditions apart from any religious basis, while the old Apocalypticists based all their dreams of future blessedness on their faith in God, in whom was their only hope in a world that without His grace and help was fast going to irretrievable destruction.

What was the burden of these Apocalyptic books? In effect they rose from, and carried further to their solution, the religious problems dealt with by the great Hebrew prophets. What troubled these prophets most was the contrast between the character of God as revealed to them—righteous, holy, and loving—and the state of the world as they found it—a world under the heel of proud oppressors, a world of moral confusion and distress, in which the righteous nation was afflicted, the good was downtrodden, and the wicked "enjoying a good time." With passionate faith they all looked forward to a better time, to a day of the Lord, when He would

come forth in wrath and righteousness to punish the wicked, reward the faithful, and found a glorious kingdom in which all good men would be vindicated, and righteousness be brought forth into judgment. The central figure in this heavenly Apocalypse was that of the Messiah, or Son of Man, who would rescue the faithful remnants of the nation, set them on high as judges of the heathen, and establish a holy realm of which there should be no end. At first it was held that this kingdom would be established on earth, but gradually the idea got linked up more and more securely with that of immortality in the life to come, with a doctrine of resurrection for the good, and with a judgment, followed by the eternal "destruction" of all wicked men, after which there was to be a new heaven and a new earth.

This faith had become almost universal in Israel when our Lord appeared. He was brought up in its atmosphere, and some keen students of the New Testament held that He Himself held this faith at least during His earlier life. But if He did, it was in a very different sense from that of those who heard Him preach the doctrine of the kingdom of God. They looked forward to a political Messiah, who should free them from the hated yoke of Rome and re-establish the glories of the throne of David. Even the disciples were infected with this idea, as is shown by the words of my text, when after His resurrection they said to Him: "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" But Jesus never had anything to say to this attitude except to discourage it absolutely. His kingdom, He told Pilate, was "not of this world." He had come to save the world spiritually, not politically; from the slavery of sin, not from servitude to a foreign power;

from the yoke of Satan, not the authority of Cæsar; and He sternly repressed all attempts to forestall the movement of events, nor would He at any time lift the veil of the future. Indeed He told His disciples more than once that He Himself did not know the details of that future, nor the time of His second coming. "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Luke xiii. 32). And here in my text He says to the disciples, ever eager to have the veil of the future lifted for them: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power."

II

Expectation of the Early Church.—In spite of this clear and repeated warning by our Lord the Early Church clung to the belief that He was coming again soon in the clouds to judge the earth, and establish a heavenly kingdom on earth. Those early believers, being simple-minded and mostly unlettered men, mixed up the pure spiritual teaching of Jesus with the extravagant apocalyptic dreams they had inherited from their forefathers, and which were constantly being revised and re-elaborated by some fresh writer of their own times. Even St. Paul, at least in his early years as a believer, was possessed by this belief—that Christ was coming again in glory, and that during his own lifetime. In the Thessalonians this belief fills the whole horizon, and we find it here and there in all his earlier writings. But the chief book which expresses this faith most vividly and forcibly is the book of Revelation, where we have picture after picture couched in the most luxuriant

imagery, of the signs and portents which would soon usher in the heavenly reign of Christ on earth. This book has been put out of its true place in the order in the New Testament, for it belongs (at least in part) to the period before the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

III

Dangers of Literalism.—Now we may approach this apocalyptic element in the New Testament in one of two ways. If, as was done till recently, we take the whole Bible as literally inspired in the form in which it has come down to us, and every passage and verse as of equal authority, then I suppose we must do our best to interpret it on that basis, and we are at the mercy of all the enthusiasts who, by putting this and that verse together in new patterns, can turn out as many theories of the second coming or of any other doctrine as there are forms of human ingenuity to construct them. That is what has happened in times past with this problem of the second coming, and that to the great detriment of true religion. Time would fail me if I began to tell you of the various extravagant theories that have been held from time to time on this question. Hardly any great event in history of a spectacular and disturbing kind has taken place but some devout believer has announced it as a prelude to the imminent second coming of Christ; and no sooner has time disproved one theory than it has been succeeded by another. In earlier centuries one school or writer after another brought forth a new millennial scheme. For instance, almost the whole of Christendom looked forward to the year 1000 A.D. as the date of the end of the present world, and when that date passed and

nothing happened, a terrible state of laxity and immorality followed throughout Europe as a rebound from the previous tension, and since then, after every great political and international disturbance, there have been schools and sects who have elaborated the subject anew. Early in the last century Napoleon was generally thought to be anti-Christ, whose evil deeds, according to the theory, were to precede the coming of our Lord. Actual dates were fixed by various writers before and since for His appearing: 1785 by Stilling, 1830 by Bengel, 1843 by Miller in America, 1866-67-68 by Dr. Cumming, 1878 (and other dates) by Bagster, and 1890 by the Mormon Church. In that remarkable periodical, the *Christian Herald and Signs of Our Times*, an almost continuous agitation has been kept up for many years on this subject, and many people have been put into a state of repeated nervous tension, amounting often to insanity, as one expectation after another has been falsified and another taken its place. And now, at the end of the ages, owing to this terrible war, our friends who have signed this first manifesto which I read to you have laid down these propositions and set the minds and hearts of many into a flutter of expectation that the issue of this struggle is to be a visible appearing of the Lord in the air, and the beginning of His heavenly reign on earth.

IV

What are we to say to it all? In my judgment, and probably that of my co-signatories to the second manifesto, just this:

We must approach the New Testament in a historical and critical (which does not, mark you,

mean in a sceptical) spirit, and consider it, not as a verbally inspired book, but as a perfectly honest and genuine record of the position and beliefs of the first believers in Jesus Christ. It is the record of what they thought and did and believed during that wonderful period when Jesus appeared in the flesh, taught, died, rose again, and sent forth His spirit of grace into the midst of His Church. Now, when the Gospel was taken to the heart of those noble men it did not find their minds swept and garnished of all their previous beliefs. On the other hand, it found itself mixed up with a very thick tangle of beliefs which they had inherited from their past as Jews, with which the Gospel had to struggle, which it only conquered by degrees, and which it has even now only partially overcome even in our own minds. Central to these beliefs was the faith that God was going to appear in the sky to judge a very wicked world in righteousness, and establish a kingdom which would embrace all men and all nations under His rule for ever. This was to be done by a sudden irruption from the clouds of heaven, and its agent was to be the Son of Man whom they identified with Jesus Christ. What we have to remember is that this is not a Christian belief at all, but a Jewish belief, confused by the early Christian Church with the essential Gospel, which it has taken nearly two thousand years to recognise in its true character. The Christian Gospel is spiritual, not carnal; it deals with the reign of God in the soul, not with the outward affairs of politics and empires—except as these are purified and uplifted by its spirit—and its relation to the future is to moralise its forces and institutions, not to wait for a miraculous and spectacular interference from above in order to set matters

outwardly right. It is, in other words, the Gospel of the Grace of God acting on the souls of believers, and through them on the world at large, and its agent is the Spirit of Christ, which is the Spirit of God, shed abroad in men's hearts, as leaven in meal, as seed in the soil, and issuing in a joyful sense of reconciliation to God through the eternal Cross, and a new life in Christ of holiness and love.

I say it has taken two thousand years to get this central Gospel disentangled from the mass of Jewish beliefs with which it was confused. And yet we can see this disentangling process already at work in the New Testament itself. If, instead of taking the books of the New Testament in their present order, which is quite haphazard as regards time, we place them in the order in which they were written, this will be clear enough. Let us only deal with St. Paul. The first letters which he wrote were the two letters to the Thessalonians, then came Galatians, 1 Corinthians, Romans, 2 Corinthians, and then after an interval Philippians, Colossians, and the Ephesians. If you read them in this order a very remarkable but instructive fact will emerge—that while in the earlier letters St. Paul is entirely obsessed by the second coming of Jesus as something to be expected at any moment, and that while he himself as well as his readers were alive, this belief gradually waned as time went on, till, after about ten years, it had almost, if not quite, disappeared from his mind, so that in the Ephesians and Philippians you will find hardly a trace of it. Nor do you find it, except in the faintest and most spiritual way, in the Gospel and Epistles of John, which are the latest of all the New Testament books to be written, and that a good many years afterwards.

How, then, do we account for the fact that this belief reappeared so obstinately in later ages? For two reasons: (1) First, there is a side of human nature which is very open to that kind of religion which deals in the spectacular and dramatic, looks for signs and portents, depends more on the "unrelated miraculous" than on the moral aspects of the spiritual life, and which loves to find indications of sudden irruptive Divine power in the world of events. (2) And secondly, when the canon of the New Testament closed, and it was put together in the order in which we have it, by the doctors of the Church, and all sense of its historical order was lost, the Epistles to the Thessalonians, instead of being put first in the list of Paul's writings, were put near the end of the list. And thus the fact was obscured till quite a few years ago that Paul's expectation of the second coming belongs to the earlier period of his Christian life, and that it gradually gave way to a more spiritual and moral grasp of the Gospel, in which the Jewish beliefs he held when he became a Christian were swallowed up and almost disappeared. And this position was complicated by the theory of infallible verbal inspiration which made every word of the New Testament of equal value and authority. It is only within the last generation that —I will not say merely a more scientific and historical, but—a more common-sense view of the Bible has been reached. If we read it as we do other books, and disentangle from its temporary ideas the eternal, abiding Gospel which it enshrines, we shall not only come to see more clearly what the essential Gospel means for us, but we shall clear out of the way a good deal of the rubble and silt of thought which has come down the stream of history with that

Gospel. This is being slowly done by the so-called critical—but which I prefer to call the historical—treatment of the Bible ; and we shall be saved much that has kept back the Church in the past from being the true Church of Christ, Son of God and Saviour of the world, when this method is universally recognised.

And if we do this, all this theory about a miraculous, spectacular, thaumaturgic second coming of Jesus Christ in physical, visible form will be seen to be so much fantasy. It will pass away like smoke, leaving the pure flame of God's truth burning clear and bright. The spiritual Gospel will rise phœnix-like from the ashes of worn-out controversies, and be free to burn its way through all the evils of society, and so sweeten the world from its sin and foulness.

V

Is there, then, no truth in the idea of a second coming of the Redeemer to claim the whole world for Himself? Is He not to reign till He has put all His enemies under His feet ?

Yes ; blessed be God, this is a sure expectation of faith. There are two truths which this old doctrine contains, which are of central and perennial value to us as Christians. What are they ?

1. The first is that the future belongs to Christ as Lord of all things. Unless we can believe this with all our heart, then Christianity is doomed. Jesus came not to save a few people, not to save a chosen nation merely, but to save mankind. He is the Saviour of the world, and of the whole world. He is God's hand stretched forth in redeeming power to snatch the soul of man from the

forces of sin and death. "But now we see not yet all things put under His feet. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man. . . ." "Wherefore God also highly exalted Him, and gave Him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." That is the essential Gospel for which Jesus died, and which Paul finally preached, and which men in all ages have believed. And that Gospel is true. It will come to pass. When, we know not; how, we know not; for the future in its details is hidden from us, and we are told not to speculate "about times and seasons." And in that faith we can rest and work and wait God's good time, sure that He will not tarry.

2. Secondly, the doctrine of the second coming is true in that it makes it perfectly clear and unmistakable that the conquering forces of redemption are in God's hand, not ours. We have of late years been trying to improve and save the world by means of human forces. Education, sanitation, social purity, moral training, self-improvement, evolution, civilisation on a secular basis—these have been our watchwords. The millennium was to come through enlightenment, and the slow forces of social evolution in a naturalistic sense. And the result has been twofold; first, the Church has lost its authoritative note; it has ceased largely to guide and inspire men in their work; it is "a belt that has slipped off the driving wheel of progress." That is one result, and it has

come about because the Church has not kept clearly and constantly before its own mind that all its hope is not in the seen, but in the unseen, not in man, but in God. And, secondly, this secular notion of progress has resulted in this war. It is because Germany, with her usual thoroughness, has incarnated this idea of secular progress, of material civilisation, with absolute consistency, that we are now struggling with her in this deadly way. And it is because Britain and America had fortunately not yet come to the same complete surrender to the secularist principle, but have sprung back into their traditional attitude of belief in moral reality, that we are ranged on the other side. When this war ends, as end it must, in our victory, we shall then be bound in self-consistency to return wholeheartedly to the Gospel view of life, that all hope of true progress is based on spiritual grounds. Every true reformation—this is the position which lies at the root of Christ's second coming—must come from the unseen; the New Jerusalem can only come down from heaven from God. In that sense we can hold the millennial faith with glad hearts and full conviction. More than that is not "of faith"; but in that high, beautiful, and true sense we can echo the cry with which the last book in the New Testament closes: "Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!" Thus, in Browning's words in "Easter Eve":

> "Earth breaks up, time drops away,
> In flows heaven, with its new day
> Of endless life, when He who trod,
> Very man and very God,
> This earth in weakness, shame, and pain,
> Dying the death whose signs remain
> Up yonder on the accursed tree—

Shall come again, no more to be
Of captivity the thrall,
But the One God, all in all,
King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
As His servant John received the words :
'I died to live for evermore !'"

XXIV

THIS LIFE A PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."—1 Cor. xv. 58.

This is the climax of St. Paul's long and eloquent argument on the Resurrection problem which had been put to him by the Church at Corinth—a very wonderful climax to a very remarkable argument. I cannot summarise it just now, but what I want to point out is that the whole weight of it comes here—that our faith in immortality is of no avail except as it makes us better men and better Christians.

"Therefore," writes the Apostle—and any one who knows Paul well from his writings would know that the emphasis he would throw into this word would be tremendous—"therefore"—*i.e.*, because of the glorious prospect before the people of God of a future life, wherein all that is "mortal in us shall put on immortality," and all that is "corruptible in us shall put on incorruption"; or, in other words, where the frail shall become eternally strong and the old perennially young—"therefore let all your energy be turned to good ends, be indefatigable in the work of God, since nothing of good is lost, and all we aim at will be fulfilled."

This, then, is our subject: "What influence

should the thought of a future life have on the way we live in this world? What help can such a hope give us? What courage, reinforcement, steadfastness, and abounding energy? And why should all this naturally follow from an honest and hearty belief that this life is not all, but only a preface to a higher?"

I

I must begin with a statement which is not very encouraging from a Christian standpoint, but which I am afraid is true—that there has not often been an age when the belief in a future life had so little influence on men's thoughts and lives as that before the war.

I do not believe that there was any widespread tendency to deny a future life, or even to doubt it, at any time in the world's history. The number of people who have ever been thorough sceptics on this point is very few, the number of genuine atheists is fewer still. I have been carefully taking note of the attitude of soldiers and of those who have lost dear friends and relatives in this war, and I have as yet met none who have doubted that these dear lads who have given their lives for their country are still alive somewhere—beyond the veil of sense in the eternal world. And I think this has been so always, however little people may say about it. Hardly anyone doubts the prospect of a future life for all. We are not born to die; we die to live. This life is an episode, a scene in a drama, a stage in a pilgrimage, a chapter in the working out of an eternal destiny for the human soul. That is the natural and instinctive faith of mankind always and everywhere.

The question is not whether a man shall live again

in another world, but what difference should that make to us here? And my contention was that of late years—*i.e.*, before the war—the thought of a future life, while the fact was not denied, had very little conscious influence on the lives of most men and women. Let me give you some proof of this position. At the beginning of the present century a *questionnaire* was issued by the American branch of the Society for Psychical Research under the title of "Human Sentiment with Regard to a Future Life." Thousands of replies came back. Among the questions asked was this: "Do you feel the question of a future life to be of urgent importance to your mental comfort?" and to these 1,807 persons said definitely "No," adding often, "not at all," "never think of it," etc., while 1,314 (a little more than 33 per cent. of all the replies) replied in the affirmative, most of them saying that a future existence was to them, not only a matter of faith, but of profound influence on their daily conduct. A few years later, as many of you will remember, a long controversy rose in the *Daily Telegraph* on the question, "Do we Believe?" and the Editor summed up the discussion in these words: "I should imagine that, so far as this correspondence reflects the mind of the English people, the believers [in a future life] must be ten or twelve times as numerous as the doubters, and this, too, in an age which has evidently been rashly styled a sceptical one. Yet, looking at existing conditions, no one can fail to observe that the majority of men, so far from thinking about another world, are quite content to limit their ambitions and desires to the present. . . ."

I wish I could go into and expound a little fully the reasons why this ancient and certainly Christian

attitude towards this life as a preparation for the next has changed, and changed for the worse. It has been put down by some to the fact that during the closing decades of last century there were certain sceptical scientific men who had the ear of the public, and who preached the doctrine that science had destroyed the foundation of faith in a future life—a position no reputable scientist would care to uphold to-day. It has been said also that the break-up of the old theories of heaven and hell, and of the belief that death ends all probation—which has certainly gone by the board—has disturbed the faith and slackened the interest of many in the future life. And there is doubtless the fact that the ever-deepening interest of the life that now is, and its ever-increasing pressure, tend to absorb the thought and attention of most men, and to drive all consideration of what lies beyond death into the far background. Only in the very presence of death, or face to face with the loss of dear ones whom he loved as his own soul, or during some deadly illness of his own, does the average man, even if he be a believer in Jesus Christ, really think much of the life beyond, and how it should shape his course in this life. As a result, the old attitude of otherworldliness with which our forefathers were (I think unjustly) charged has given way to hitherworldliness—*i.e.*, an absorption in the affairs of this life to the exclusion of all thought of another, and that among people who might be expected to show another temper.

II

This, I contend, is an unreasonable, illogical, and perilous attitude, not easy for anyone to defend.

The only man who can in any sense be justified in dismissing the idea of another life is the man who is honestly convinced that it has been disproved. If we do believe that a man dies to live again, then we are duty-bound so to live here that we shall gain all possible help and satisfaction from the thought of what lies ahead of us ; so that the present life may take its proper place as a true preparation for the next. That is the lesson of this text, and that is the true Christian attitude towards this very important matter.

Let me ask you therefore to face a few considerations that show the proper bearing of the future life on the present:

1. I will begin by putting the negative.

What shall we say of this life if it is the only one we have to live ?

Nay, what shall we say of the universe itself, which has brought forth all its treasures of life, thought, aspiration, idealism, hope, and all the higher outlook of the soul, only to quench them all in the waters of death ? What would such a universe be in the end but the grave of its own bright promises, the mausoleum of its glorious possibilities ? As we look back at the evolving course of the world, from the star-mist with which the fair world we live in began, up through the slow unfoldings of matter and life, up at last to man, "the heir," as Browning puts it, "of hopes too fair to turn out false"—what a wonderful unfolding of possibilities, what a promising drama of good! Surely there must be something great and noble to come out of all this travail and sorrow, all this joy and impulse, all this upward striving and climbing from stage to stage, and height to height, of effort and partial attainment?

And the only answer according to this negative solution is—nothing! Everything rises only to fall, everything is born only to die, everything begins only to end. There is one end to the good and the evil; to the just man and the unjust. Is this a cheerful prospect for beings such as we are? Should we care to be the authors of such a universe ourselves? Could anyone respect any creator as rational who would make such a universe? We might indeed be forced to admire His ingenuity, His energy, His wealth of resources, but honour Him we could not, and worship Him we would not; for this universe, after all, would be only an idle tale "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

And what of our own little life lived under such conditions?

From the animal point of view it might under certain circumstances still be a very fair life, and might be made a very happy one if all combined to make it so for one another. We have been made to enjoy life. We are "in tune" with the physical universe so far as our normal constitution is concerned. The eye for light, light for the eye, the ear for music, and music for the ear; sweet and bitter for the palate, and the palate for them; there is a wonderful, happy, and surely beneficent adaptation between our senses and the world we live in. Then there is the mind for truth, the heart for love, the will for adventure, the soul for aspiration. Ideally, there is much cause for believing that a good Creator has been at work making the world and us for each other.

But that is, alas! only the ideal way of looking at things. This is a world where things might be made all right for a creature like man, but where things

are not right as a matter of fact. Made for satisfaction, and capable of satisfaction, man is scarcely ever so placed that he is able to get at the springs of satisfaction in this life. Many an eye that is made and which longs for the moor and the mountain is caged in a slum all its days ; many a soul capable of great things is doomed to die unrealised, a village Hampden, a genius unappreciated or unknown. What heart really comes to its possibilities of loving in this life ? What mind is satisfied with its poor grasp of truth ? Which soul, "aiming at a million, and missing a unit," can die content, with eternity in its heart, but no eternity to reach to on the other side ? I look upon all great works of art as so many passionate attempts, whether in poetry, painting, sculpture, music, eloquent speech, or noble literature, to capture something of eternity and imprison it in the things of time, at once witnessing to the unconquerable faith of the soul in the ideal beauty, while feeling its utter inability to realise it on the scale of the mere *here* and *now*, thus proclaiming the deathless faith of art in immortality. And I look at the attempts of law-givers and courts of justice as a clumsy but sincere attempt to bear witness to an ideal justice, whose scales are too vast for both ends to find room in this life, so that one is in this life and the other in the next. And I look at the unsatisfied longings of the best men and women for what is good and holy, loving and true, in this world, all the aspirations that soar beyond the stars while the feet are tangled in the miry ways of this poor life, as so much proof that man's soul is made for better things than this world contains, is built on a scale and with a scope impossible to realise here, and is meant to rise to heights of glorious achievement of which

here we have only the dimmest promise. Without another life to complete this, all these high instincts would be proved to be purely illusory, and the world to have brought forth by accident a creature too big for her resources—a statue which is a mere torso, the full stature of which demanded two worlds in which to come to its own!

2. Let me then put the positive case.

If the hope of immortality is such that we can afford to build our house of life on it confidently, as a solid rock and not shifting sand, what then?

(*a*) Then, for one thing, I am assured that the inequalities of this life will be redressed and compensated in the next. It was no accident in my opinion that caused our Lord in the parable of Dives and Lazarus to make Abraham say to the rich man: "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime received thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented." This is only a vivid way of expressing the faith that there are compensatory elements in the unseen world that restore the balance of this life's inequalities and injustices. Unless there is such a principle, how can we believe in the inherent goodness at the heart of things which we all long to believe in, and in secret do believe in? Otherwise we should not be able to look at the terrible injustices of life without losing all faith that this is a God-guided and righteous universe. But as I do believe in a future life, I am entitled to believe that much that is crooked here will there be made straight; that much that is high here or low will be made low or high there; and that the uneven balance of earthly experience will be trimmed in the heavenly fields and the eternal courts. And that enables me to envisage the worst things

that happen to me or to others without bitterness or despair, but with an infinite hope that in God's good day all shall be made right.

(*b*) Again, as I believe in the life to come, I feel bold to believe also that the instinct for spiritual growth is not to be quenched in death, but that there is an unlimited scope for all my powers in the beyond, so that I can go on developing them to the utmost of my possibilities, sure that no effort after goodness will be in vain, but that I shall come to my own, if not here, then there ; if not now, then in the mansions above.

This, then, is the value of the doctrine of a future life for the life that now is. It is a guarantee that the sense of delayed justice, the spiritualising of character, the aspirations of the soul for the good, the true, and the beautiful are not doomed to final disappointment and eclipse, but will come to fruition in a better world, where to aim at will be to accomplish, to dream will be to realise, to aspire will be to attain. And conversely let no man imagine that if he is careless, vicious, sensual, pleasure-loving, selfish here he will find all well with him yonder! "It is appointed to men once to die, and after that cometh judgment!" Here is a court from which there is no appeal, a verdict which, weighing all and allowing for all, will not permit the wicked to go unpunished. We can play with human justice and cheat human tribunals, but no man can cheat the God of holiness, even though he be the God of love, for "our God is a consuming fire," and woe unto the man who, having misspent and squandered his earthly chances, will fall into the hands of this living God! "Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before His eyes," lest there fall on

you the penalty, which, often delayed here, will not halt nor fail yonder!

On the other hand, to you who have given yourselves into the hands of the great soul-artist, who will shape you to high uses, and bring out the Divine elements in your soul to their fullest grace and beauty, the words of my text apply in all sincerity and sureness: "Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

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